

Kim – Prologue

"I may be late tonight, do you want me to put something in the crock pot?"

"I'll just eat the leftovers, Michelle. I have your BOB done, you really should take it with you."

"I'm running late, I'll take it tomorrow. I didn't get my Browning either. See ya."

She gave me a quick peck and was gone. I had some time before work so I turned on the TV to see how the conflict involving Iran was going, how the conflict with Taiwan was going and if there was anything to cause me to stay home. It didn't appear the balloon was about to go up so I went to work. I had my BOB and my M1911.

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She sat across from me, staring; more looking through me than at me. So far, the only thing I knew about her was that her name was Kim. Could that be short for Kimberly? I'd have to ask, eventually. The past three months had been Hell on Earth. I guess I'd better explain.

The first clue we had that something had gone wrong was when international internet service was lost. The powers that be quickly determined that the fiber optic cables had been cut in multiple places. They had no estimate on repair time. The US had set up that radar in Europe and placed the 9 ABM interceptors to protect us against Iran launching missiles. Vladimir Putin had carefully orchestrated a successor and more or less still ran Russia. Russia had fought the ABM project tooth and nail and had lodged a protest with the UN.

Various countries had been building their military forces and India and China both had large forces of mostly Russian equipment. India was more liberal in who it chose to provide its equipment and had quite a mix. Argentina was also spending oil money on arms.

During early 2008, it became apparent that the Republican front runners were actually McCain and Huckabee. The Democrat front runners were Obama and Clinton. By the time the conventions rolled around, there was no clear leader for either party. Huckabee held the south and McCain held the more liberal states. McCain had more delegates and in a compromise move, the Republican ticket was McCain – Palin. Obama had a narrow lead among Democrats, but Hillary wasn't about to compromise, some said she'd already been Vice-President for 8 years. The Clintonistas pulled a whole lot of dirty tricks and they failed. The ticket became Obama – Biden.

I thought that the Republicans had a chance to remain in power. It came down to the Supreme Court deciding the elections, again. This time, the Democrats got the nod. As a single man at the time, I figured I could stand to pay a few more dollars in taxes be-

cause more taxes were sure to follow. Keep in mind, Hillary voted to support the war, Obama didn't.

She had this big agenda, national health care, pull out of the war on terror, trim military spending and pay for all of it by raising taxes. She ended up as Secretary of State.

The Supreme Court issued its ruling on that DC case, upholding in part, reversing and remanding on a single question to the Appellate Court. Since it was a question of fact, not law, the Appellate Court sent it back to the federal district court. The district court would have to determine the fact, issue a ruling and then, depending on that decision, it would begin the long slow process to the Supreme Court, again.

The Recession was in full swing and had been for about four years, not that that matters now. I'm trying to give a view of how things were just before the crap hit the fan. When Israel thought Iraq was developing a nuclear weapon, they destroyed the reactor at Osiraq. In early 2008, they suggested that Iran would have the necessary plutonium for a bomb in about 3 years. Iran ran into problems with their reactor operations and didn't even come close before 2012. On December 19, 2012, Israel bombed the Iranian reactors. It wasn't the clean, concise attack like Osiraq, it was rather messy. Using conventional bombs only, they did their best to eliminate the threat.

That was about 3 weeks ago. There were immediate protests in the UN. The Arab nations declared war on Israel. Iran began launching conventionally tipped missiles at everyone, but primarily at Israel. Israel responded by launching nuclear tipped Jericho III missiles at Iran. The Saudis launched the nuclear missiles they didn't have against Israel. Syria and Egypt attacked, avoiding the contaminated areas.

China began launching conventional missiles across the Formosa Straits against Taiwan and put its entire Navy to sea. That's unusual because China's Navy never strays far from port. The media indicated that our military was on an elevated state of alert, but never said what the state was. The Czech Republic had the new radar and Poland the new ABMs.

Contrary to popular opinion, the US has operational Blackbirds in its inventory. Some are listed as operational, some as reserve and one as storage. Obama spent a lot of money in the next two days keeping them airborne. It was easier, apparently, to fly an aircraft that costs \$300,000 per mission than re-tasking satellites. Bet you didn't know that, did you?

Within 2 days a bad situation had gotten worse and while the White House tried to decide what to do, Iran launched on Europe. The ABMs mostly worked, but London wouldn't be calling for a long time to come. I thought that was the end of it, but Pakistan launched on India and China and a full out missile exchange began. We had about 20 minutes notice that an inbound attack was coming. That was barely enough time for me to get home and tucked away in the basement. Michelle never made it.

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"My name is Barry Simpson. Could you tell me your last name?"

"Why, does it matter?"

"No, I don't suppose it does. My wife, Michelle, never made it home from work. After the fallout died down, I went looking, but never found her. What happened to you?"

"I was home, sick in bed with the stomach flu. The apartment manager got everyone into the basement before the missiles struck. They let us out after 14 days and said we were on our own. After a few days, I went looking for groceries and ran into you. I'm not married. My last name is Wilson."

"Kim Wilson, I am pleased to meet you."

"Whatever. I mean, what's the use? The world all but wiped itself out on December 21st. I have no job, very little food, the lights are out, the gas is off, I don't know why God spared me."

"You believe in God?"

"I'm a Christian, why?"

"It's a start. You have something to believe in."

"Are you a Christian?"

"Yes. About three-quarters of the population is Christian."

"Can I trust you?"

"I'm the last person you should ask that question; but yes, you can trust me."

"You seem to be pretty well off. With this much food, why were you in the grocery store?"

"You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you. Some things store forever. Things you find in a store that qualify are pasta, beans and rice. If you know how to do it, you can store flour for several years. Besides, Michelle and I hadn't begun to fill our freezer so I wanted as much canned meat as I could find."

"Tell me about her."

"Michelle?"

"Yes. She's your wife, right?"

"Ah, right. She's my age, 29. She has long brunette hair that she brushes every night. I suppose she has sort of an average build and is 5' 4". We've been married 3 years. I looked everywhere she might be and there's no sign of her. We don't have any children, we were waiting until she was 32."

"She sounds nice. So, what are you, one of those crazy survivalist types?"

"Survivalism is a commonly used term for the preparedness strategy and subculture of individuals or groups anticipating and making preparations for a future possible disruptions in local, regional, national and/or worldwide social or political order. Survivalists often prepare for this anticipated disruption by learning skills like emergency medical training, stockpiling food and water, preparing for self-defense and self-sufficiency, and/or building structures that will help them to survive or disappear."

"You start accumulating this after you got married?"

"The food, yes. I already had the gun collection that I inherited from my father."

"How did you do so much in such a short time? It would have taken me forever to get that much stuff."

"We made a list of everything we wanted. Then we'd buy two instead of one or wait until it went on sale and really stock up. It helped having two incomes, to a limited extent, but mostly we got it on sale."

"What guns?"

"Well, I have this one, it's a M1911 .45ACP," I said pulling my concealed pistol.

"I didn't see that or I'd have never come with you."

"And, of course, I have all the guns in my gun safe."

"Is that what's in the safe?"

"Yes, my father's and my gun collections. I have three guns of my own, the .45, a civilian version of the M14 and the USMC version of the Mossberg shotgun."

"It's Greek to me."

"My father liked older firearms. He had my grandfather's Winchester model 92 in .44-40, his own Winchester model 94 in .45 Colt, a Winchester model 12 shotgun, a Remington model 870 with spare barrel, single action revolvers in both .44-40 and .45 Colt. When he got into collecting Colt firearms, he picked up an AR15 to round out his collection."

Michelle liked the 9mm pistol round and her Browning Hi-Power is in the safe. I managed to get ammo before the price went through the roof, back in 2006."

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I could see the conversation was making Kim nervous and changed the subject. I had the impression that she would be more comfortable working for the Brady Group than carrying a handgun. Besides, there was one more place I wanted to check to see if I could find Michelle. I'd forgotten that two doors down from her office building was a gun store with a basement. The dealer kept his special guns in the basement and operated his class 3 business out of there. I thought maybe Michelle had gone there.

"You help yourself to whatever you want to eat. I have to run an errand but shouldn't be gone long."

"Going looking for your wife?"

"I have to know. Sorry, I should be back soon."

It was a short drive to her office and the gun store. The door was closed, but oddly wasn't locked. I slipped my .45 out and thumbed the safety off. The store was empty and a portion of the inventory usually found on the shelves was missing. I entered the back room and descended the steps. There were two men laying at the bottom of the stairs, both dead. I didn't recognize either of them. The door to the basement salesroom was open and I looked in. The gun dealer was lying there, surrounded by a pool of dried blood. There was brass everywhere; it had been quite the shootout. Off to one side, I noticed more blood and went to look.

She lay there, long dead, also surrounded by a pool of dried blood. I slumped to the floor, dropping my handgun and burying my face in my hands. I don't know how long I sat there, minutes or hours. I gently picked her up and took her upstairs and laid her in my truck. I returned to the basement and looked around for anything I could use. I picked up a few things and put them in the toolbox on my truck. The drive back wasn't any longer, still, it seemed as if it were. I pulled into the garage and went to the basement to talk to Kim.

"You're back, did you find her?"

"Yes, I found her."

"Where is she?"

"In my truck."

"Oh, you mean... "

"She dead. I'll be back in a bit, I need to put her to rest."

"I'm sorry, Barry."

"So am I Kim, so am I."

I got my pick and shovel and dug a shallow grave in the backyard. It was deep enough to keep animals away, but certainly wasn't six feet deep. I returned to the kitchen and got a wash cloth to wash her face. I got a blanket from the linen closet and wrapped her in it. Finally, I laid her to rest then forced myself to close the grave. Then I got the things from my toolbox so I could put them in my gun safe.

Kim seemed a bit more animated, was she sensing my pain? Her face scrunched up when I open the gun safe and she seemed relieved after I added the things and re-locked it. It had taken nearly a year to get Michelle beyond the guns are bad stage and a few more months before she became willing to carry. I'll give her this much, she went down fighting.

Me? I went into the Army after high school. After the Army, I went to tech school and got a job in security. That's where I met Michelle. We dated for two years and then got married. Like I said, we were waiting to start a family. I was armed security, mostly guarding bonded shipments. It was a little more work to get the armed security credentials, but the pay was better.

Kim – Chapter 1

"What did you put in the safe?"

"Accessories."

"What kind of accessories?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, really."

"Do you know what a sound suppressor is?"

"Do they call them silencers?"

"That's one name. The gun dealer sold firearms and accessories to the police. I got a threaded barrel for my 1911, and an Evolution 45. The rifle silencers are made by Surefire, the flashlight company."

"I thought they were illegal."

"That's more true than not; however, the rules have been suspended for the duration plus six months."

"The next thing I know, you're going to tell me you have a .50 caliber rifle."

"No, Kim I don't. However, I intend to rectify that situation immediately. You can have your choices of bunks, I think it might be better to sleep in the basement for the time being."

"Why?"

"The radiation level is down but an accumulated dose could cause cancer. How long were you out in the radiation?"

"I was out of the basement after two weeks. I spent most of my time in my apartment until I ran out of food. Am I going to die?"

"Someday, for sure. The outside level wasn't that high, I think you will be ok."

"But you said we had to sleep in the basement."

"It will help average out your radiation dose. In general terms you're allowed to accumulate 300 Rads in 120 days or 2.5 Rads per day. A dose of half that might increase your cancer risk significantly."

"How do you know this stuff?"

"Do you have a computer?"

"Yes."

"Internet?"

"I did."

"It's all out there, all you have to do is to search. I must have over a thousand files of information I downloaded to my computer. Most are in portable document format."

"What's that mean?"

"They're pdf files. You can read them but can't change them unless you have Adobe Acrobat. The file reader is free."

"How come you have power?"

"We, er, I have a generator. I also have my own well and a propane tank."

"Yep, like I said, you're a survivalist. I didn't bring anything to wear."

"I don't suppose you'd want to sleep in the buff, would you? Try that large blue storage box, it should have some things that will fit you."

"Am I the same size as she was?"

"It has an assortment of sizes and is all women's clothing. The green box is men's clothing. Just look through it and find some things that will work. If there's not enough, we can go to your place and get some of your things, later."

"Where can I change?"

"You found the bathroom, I presume, change in there."

I expected her to find a warm flannel nightgown. The basement was a little on the cool side. She took the clothes she found and came out dressed in jeans, blouse and sweat shirt. She'd have had more modesty with the nightgown. Jeans by Glidden, the paint company. So far, I was unimpressed with Kim. She wasn't hard on my tired eyes, but she seemed about 4 cards short of a full deck. After she turned in, I showered and re-dressed in clean clothes. This soon after, I didn't want to have to stop and get dressed if something happened. I made sure the house was locked up and locked the basement door before I turned in.

I was awake by 5am. I started coffee and then cleaned up. I didn't want to shave, but if I had to don a gas mask for some reason, I had to be clean shaven. Sleeping beauty didn't get up until 7. I used the fresh eggs because they wouldn't keep and had ham, eggs and toast ready by the time Kim was out of the bathroom. She came to the table brushing her hair.

"Would you mind terribly not doing that at the breakfast table? I really rather not have hair in my omelet."

"Sorry, I'll do it later."

"Don't get used to fresh eggs and store bought bread, they won't last long. I have some loaves of frozen bread dough, but we'll have to make our own someday soon."

"It smells good."

"It tastes better. I need to learn a bit more about you, Kim. I don't mean to pry, but the information will reflect on your long term survival."

"Try me."

"Let's start with the gun thing. Have you ever had a situation where a gun was involved? Or, do you just buy into the anti-gun rhetoric?"

"I've never handled a gun. They're dangerous. Guns kill people."

"Yes, guns are dangerous. People kill people. The gun is only a tool. I'd imagine more people are killed every year by cars than firearms. Would you also outlaw cars?"

"What about all those gun accidents we read about in the papers?"

"First, there aren't that many. Second, the majority of those that occur are due to carelessness or failure to follow the safety rules for handling firearms. From this point on, the survivors will be forced to use guns as a tool to ensure their survival."

She shuttered perceptibly. I moved on, we had a lot to cover.

"Plus we need to check out several more grocery stores looking for LTS foods."

"Huh?"

"Long term storage foods, the stuff I mentioned to you yesterday."

"Oh, right, beans and rice."

"And coffee, tea, spices, wheat and other grains if we can find them. I'll need more propane later on and more diesel fuel."

"What do you need me for, beside the obvious?"

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind..." – John Donne

"Huh?"

"Companionship, a partner to help me get through this, take your pick."

"I'm not sleeping with you."

"I don't expect you to."

"Why, aren't I pretty enough?"

"You pretty enough Kim and I'm sure you will make someone a fine wife, if that's what you want. I buried my wife yesterday and at the moment, I'm not looking for a replacement."

"Do I really have to learn to use a gun?"

"No, but that would make you a liability to both yourself and me."

"You're assuming I'll stick around?"

"If you have somewhere else to go, don't let the door hit you on the butt on your way out."

"I don't, so I guess I'll stay, for now."

"If you stay, you're going to have to pull your own weight. We have power and propane for now, but it can't last indefinitely. That's why there are dual fuel lanterns and oil lamps packed in some of those boxes. We planned fairly well, I think, but only time will tell. The most pressing business at hand is to get you accustomed to firearms. I think I'll start you with the 10/22 rifle; no recoil, light and reasonably accurate, nothing to scare off a new shooter."

I gathered up the 10/22, the AR15, boxes of .22LR, some loaded magazines for the assault rifle and led Kim up to the backyard. We could shoot the .22 using the concrete wall as a backstop. When we advanced to the .223, we'd have to move to keep from punching a hole in the filled in blocks. I went through the safety lecture commonly given to all new shooters. Then I pointed out the finer points of this particular gun, the cross

bolt safety, the magazine, sighting, etc. I got her to load the magazine and load it into the rifle. I showed her how to jack a round into the chamber and she emptied the magazine into a target taped to the wall.

"How was that?"

"Let's go look and you tell me."

"I did good, all the holes are in the paper."

"How many are in the black?"

"Three."

"Where were you aiming?"

"At the black, just like you said."

"At this range you should have had all 10 in the black, let's put up a new target and try again."

The range was about 25 meters, give or take. We shot up two boxes of cartridges before she could put all ten rounds in the black. Kim was beaming which, when compared to her earlier attitude, was a major improvement.

"This rifle is almost the same caliber and the bullets only weigh a little more than the bullets in the rifle you've been shooting. It has almost no recoil, but may be a little louder. I can fix that with the suppressor, but for now, I just want you to try one magazine. The rifle is sighted in and I'll adjust the sights for 25 meters."

My primary thought was avoiding overloading Kim. The AR15 was an assault rifle and in a slightly different form had been the dominate weapon of our military for over 45 years. If she could avoid being turned off by its looks, she'd be halfway there. If I got the suppressor installed, it was near the top of my list of things to do, she wouldn't be put off by the sound of the rifle firing and would have a superior flashhider. I planned to wait on the handguns, they require more from the shooter and I didn't have a threaded barrel or suppressor for the Browning.

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She did well with the AR. Starting her on the 10/22 had been the way to go. As far as the suppressor for the Browning went, I knew for a fact that our dealer had both a threaded barrel and an Advanced Armaments Evolution 9 in stock, he'd shown them to me the day before TSHTF. I had to go back anyway, to gather his military surplus ammo and perhaps a few firearms. We returned to the basement and cleaned the weapons. Then, I gave her a total of 7 AR15 magazines and had her load them.

"You like guns, huh?"

"Guns are a tool. You can use a gun to kill an animal for meat. You can use a gun for self protection. Yes, I like guns because I marvel at their construction. If we can, I'll get you a different 5.56 rifle. H&K released a civilian version of their HK416 in late 2008 and it's more reliable than the AR."

"What's the difference?"

"The AR gets dirty faster and can cease to function. The HK uses a piston much like my 7.62x51mm rifle."

She looked at me like I was describing how to launch the space shuttle. We had a bite of lunch and headed to the gun store for the things I mentioned. It took a while, but I finally found the barrel and Evolution 9. The HK416 was in his walk in gun safe and I looked around for magazines. Kim joined me in the gun safe and began looking at the contents.

"What's this? Wow, it's heavy."

I looked and she was holding a Pelican rifle case and from how she leaned, I could tell that it was heavy. My heart must have skipped a beat when it occurred to me what the case might hold. I was right and her face really scrunched up this time. It was a McMillan Tac-50 with McCann night vision rail, Nightforce NXS 12-42x56mm scope and an AN/PVS-27 MUNS. There were ten magazines total, 4 parts kits including an extractor kit, ejector kit, a bolt stop kit and a firing pin kit. Based on the accessories it was the rifle package plus. There was even a suppressor from Mike's Guns.

"I'll bet that's a .50 caliber rifle."

"Good guess. I told you I didn't have one and intended to rectify the situation immediately."

"You knew he had the gun?"

"Actually, I didn't. The National Guard post where the ammo is stored isn't that far from here. I had intended to go there and see if I could find one. This is better because it's the Navy Mk-15 rather than the Army M107 version. We'll still need to go there to see if I can get ammo for the rifle. I'm sure all the dealer has is Barrett ammo."

"What's the difference?"

"Think of it this way, a large rifle can be either an anti-personnel rifle for shooting people or an anti-matériel rifle for shooting vehicles and so forth. The military uses a special cartridge that is High Explosive, Incendiary, Armor Piercing. It's called Mk 211MP, or

Raufoss. You can't get it anywhere except from the military. Barrett ammo is full metal jacket, a solid bullet."

I found the HK416 and the adapter that Surefire made for that particular rifle along with the Surefire suppressor. I also found an HK417, an adapter, suppressor and magazines. Since the 417 is more of an assault rifle than my M1A, I took that too. It took two trips to haul the ammo back to my garage, he had pallets full of .308 and .223 surplus plus a large supply of Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match he had for the Tac-50 customer. Careful selections rounded out the ammo supply so there was enough for every firearm I had.

Tomorrow, we'd go to the military post and if we had time, check out more grocery stores. The post had a Commissary and that might be a good place to look for food. I had a trailer for the old pickup and would tow it when we went.

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"What do you want to eat?"

"You're cooking?"

"You cooked yesterday and this morning, so it's my turn."

"How would you feel about pancakes?"

"Bacon or ham?"

"Either, or no meat, you choose."

Kim – Chapter 2

After dinner, Kim washed the dishes and put them away. Next, she returned to the blue box and took out the flannel nightgown. She showered and changed and I took my turn. When I came out, she was sound asleep. I dug around and found the book I'd been reading during the time I'd sheltered. I turned off the lights except for a desk lamp and read 3 chapters before I began to tire. Like the night before, I was fully dressed. I checked the locks and turned in.

Asleep, without any emotions playing on her face, Kim was downright attractive. A fact, not something to dwell on because awake, she was a totally different person. Based on her statements thus far, she was totally liberal, probably thought that police had an obligation to protect her and that we could always rely on the government to bail us out when things went bad. For the government to do that, you had to have an operative government.

I was up around dawn and made coffee. We'd had pancakes for dinner last night and while I could eat pancakes 3 meals a day, I decided to use up our cereal before it went stale. I made a quart of whole milk from our LTS supplies and set it in the refrigerator to cool. I grabbed a pack of cigarettes left over from when I still smoked and went to the garage to have a smoke and inventory the ammo.

We had enough ammo to nearly fill one garage stall. There were over 40 cases of .308 and over 60 .223. In addition, there were around 15 cases each of .45acp and 9mm and 9 cases of .45 Colt. The ammo I had the least of was .44-40, both full powered loads and cowboy loads. The full powered loads had 734ftlbs of muzzle energy compared to the weak 281ftlbs for the cowboy loads. Between the .45 Colt and the .44-40, the full powered .44-40 loads were the most powerful, having nearly doubled the muzzle energy of the .45 Colt. The .44-40 was the .44 magnum of its day.

Kim crawled out of bed, and made a potty call. I poured her a cup of coffee and set the boxes of cereal on the table. When she came out, her hair had been brushed enough so it wasn't quite the nightmare it had been the previous morning.

"Cereal?"

"Is that ok?"

"Do you have shredded wheat?"

"I'll get a box."

"Thanks."

This time she looked at me instead of through me.

"You shaved?"

"Well, yes. A person can't wear a gas mask with a beard."

"Gas mask? Why would you need one?"

"If it were unavoidable to enter a hot zone, a person would need a gas mask to keep radiation out of their lungs."

"Do you have one for me?"

"There are several and they are one size fits all."

"What's on the agenda today?"

"First we'll go to the National Guard post. If there is time, we'll check out more grocery stores."

"You can't move all the food you find here."

"We'll only be looking for long term storage foods. There are some things we'll take with a shorter storage life, but we should use those up in the first year or so."

"Won't FEMA be responding to the disaster?"

"FEMA couldn't handle New Orleans and they had advance notice. The government is not going to rescue us, if that's what you're asking. With luck we'll find others who survived and form into a community of sorts. There's security in numbers. There are always the scum that turn up after any major disaster and would rather steal from others than do their own salvaging."

"Is that what we're reduced to? Looting?"

"I beg to differ. Looting is taking something you don't really need from someone who has it. Salvaging is taking abandoned property that you can use and need to stay alive."

"That's a pretty fine hair you're splitting."

"True. The gun dealer was dead plus we didn't take his whole stock of firearms. You were in the grocery store when I found you, how were you planning to pay? Use your debit card? Write a check? Leave cash on the register? Or, perhaps you have some gold and silver coins."

"I didn't give it any thought, I was just hungry."

"You should give it some thought. When you're finished with breakfast, go change and

we'll head to the military post. Meanwhile, I'm going to change the barrel in the Browning and install silencers on everything."

Barrett had indicated that they intended to develop a silencer for the M82. However, they hadn't and at the moment, there was only one suppressor for the rifle. Barrett voided your warranty if you installed a suppressor so I took that to mean that installing a suppressor on that their rifle presented problems. I wasn't about to risk damaging the rifle. Besides, the only company I knew of that made .50 caliber suppressors was Reflex, a European company. It was only later that I learned about the Ops, Inc. 3rd model for the M82, the AWC TurboDyne, the Elite Iron suppressor and the Jet suppressor that was on the Tac-50.

Although I hadn't taught Kim anything about the Browning, it would make a fair backup gun for me. I set her up with some ALICE gear and hung on a military holster for the Browning. The silencer went into the nylon case it came with, also on the pistol belt. I took both my M1A and the HK417. Each would be more appropriate in certain circumstances, but I'd mainly go with the M1A since it was more familiar. I set her pistol up with a round chambered so all she had to do to use it was cock it and pull the trigger. This much, I explained to her.

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"Aren't you afraid that there will be troops here?"

"Have you seen any? Not really, these posts have small staffs of full time people. My expectations are that they've left to take care of their families. Most of them are NCOs and officers and are more likely to have families."

"But don't they live on post?"

"I don't really know, I suppose some may. We're not going to do a MOUT and go through every building. My only interests are the bunkers and possibly the Commissary."

"What's MOUT? You want that special ammo, huh?"

"Military Operations on Urban Terrain. There are a few other things that could come in handy, if we can find them."

"I suppose you want bombs and rockets."

"Well, I'd call them grenades instead of bombs, but rockets would be correct. It will depend on what we can find; I'd rather have small rockets than the larger rockets because I doubt we'll ever have to fight tanks."

"You expect me to use bombs? Forget it."

"Not for now. There are two kinds, offensive and defensive. I'll have to see if I can find some training grenades so I can teach you when you're ready."

"I serious doubt you'll live that long."

"Still the liberal. Well, liberal, where is FEMA? Where is the government that you expected to rescue you? It's like I said, you're going to have to learn to do it my way or hit the highway."

"You'd throw me out?"

"I will if the only thing I get from you is hostility. You eat almost as much as I do and if you were gone, it would double my supplies."

That let some of the wind out of her sails. We started searching the bunkers and eventually found everything I wanted. As far as the grenades went, I had an assortment of smoke, concussive (offensive) and fragmentation (defensive). I had 3 of the M203s and a supply of HEDP grenades to go with them. We didn't really need more ammo, but I found a SAW and a M240B, so I got the linked belts to go with them. I looked long and hard at the Ma Deuce, but passed it up primarily because of the weight of the gun and its ammo.

From there, we went to the Commissary. It had been well picked over but there were some things we could use. Since I had started smoking again, I looked for a PX so I could get smokes. I figured, "What the hell, if you don't get shot and the leftover radiation doesn't get you, you might just as well have a reason to die." When she saw me loading up on cigarettes, Kim started to say something and then seemed to think better of opening her mouth. The PX was an excellent source of some personal items for me, I was thinking ahead. I didn't realize she saw me picking them up.

"Can you drive?"

"What kind of question is that, of course I can drive."

"I didn't know, I hadn't seen you drive a vehicle. I wouldn't mind having a Ma Deuce, but they weigh too much. If we had a Hummer with a ring mount, it would solve the problem."

"Wait one minute, I drive a car not one of those monsters."

"They have power steering and an automatic transmission. Since there's no traffic on the road, you don't have to worry about the size."

"You get it ready and I'll drive it as far as your place."

"Not our place?"

"I'm considering your offer."

"What offer?"

"Your way or the highway."

"That wasn't an offer. That's just how it's going to be."

"So now I'm your slave?"

"Not at all. You're free to stay or go. If you choose to stay, you'll have to get with the program and do the things necessary for us to survive."

I went back and got the M2HB, a tripod that I put in the back of the Hummer, and all the linked ammo I could fit in the back of the Hummer and the remaining space in my trailer. We departed the post and returned to the house. I kept a careful lookout the entire way because there was no way that we were the only two survivors. Both the gun dealer and Michelle were dead and that suggested that there must have been 3 or more men.

"Those doors are heavy."

"Is that all you can do is complain?"

"I wasn't complaining, I was stating a fact. Those doors are really heavy, check it out."

"I see and you're right, this is a M1114, an uparmored Hummer."

"What's that mean?"

"It's mostly bulletproof."

"Mostly?"

"It won't stop everything. For example the special ammo I got today might punch through it."

"Men and boys. The only difference is the price of their toys. I suppose you wanted to be a cowboy when you grew up?"

"As a matter of fact, I did. Let's unload and go to a grocery store."

Kim tried to pick up a .50 caliber ammo can and found it was too heavy. She unloaded the things we got from the Commissary and the PX. We took time for a sandwich and headed out for more LTS supplies. This time, we took the Hummer and pulled the trail-

er. I had to change out the hitch on the trailer to work with the Hummer's pintle system. However, that wasn't a problem and only took a couple of minutes. I wanted to get to the Sam's Club before it had been completely emptied.

We ran into the first people we'd seen when we arrived at Sam's Club. There was a pickup backed up to the front door and two people were loading the back of the pickup with things they were taking from the store. A third individual was standing guard with an SKS. I stopped the Hummer and had Kim get behind the wheel.

"Edge up a bit so I can talk to them."

"How far?"

"About half the distance we are from them."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stand up."

I made the Ma Deuce ready as Kim slowly moved forward. When she stopped, we were close enough to talk without shouting.

"Hello, I'm Barry Simpson. Is there still some food left?"

"We are not looting, mister. We are just getting some basic foods."

"That's why we're here. We want some basic foods, too."

"You will have to wait until maw and pa are done loading the truck. It's up to them if'n you kin help yourself."

Country boy, just great. That probably meant that he could shoot the eye out of a squirrel at 50 yards, if not further. The boy knew about guns, he didn't point it at me, just in our general direction.

"If you want, we can leave and come back later."

"They are about done, jist you wait."

"What's going on?"

"We're waiting for his folks to finish loading their pickup."

"He sounds illiterate."

"Well, the song said a country boy can survive. I'd be willing to bet he's a dead shot with

that SKS."

"That what?"

"SKS. It's a Russian rifle that was made around the time of the AK-47. It uses the same ammo, too."

"Can I help you?"

"My name is Barry Simpson. We came to see if we could get some long term storage food."

"We have all we can hold, help yourself. Caleb, put up that rifle."

"I don't believe I caught your name."

"I didn't tell you my name. It's Nelson Tanner. My wife's name is Carol and I already told you Caleb's name."

"You know Mr. Tanner, there is security in numbers. Have you given any thought to getting together a group of survivors?"

"Who's the woman with you, your wife?"

"My wife died. This woman is another survivor named Kim Wilson."

"Hook up did you?"

"Probably not the way you mean, but yes, we're sharing my residence."

"Don't pay Caleb much mind, he's a bit retarded. Boy can shoot, I'll give him that. We hadn't talked about getting a group of survivors together because for all we knew, we were the only survivors."

"A city this size? There should be hundreds."

"Have you seen any?"

"Just you."

"How much food are you planning on taking?"

"Enough to fill the trailer."

"About as much as we have in our pickup. We'll be back about the same time, one week from today. We'll talk it over and let you know about joining up then."

"Do you live on a farm?"

"No, you?"

"No."

o

It would have been easy to get several wrong impressions, based solely on Caleb. He wasn't a country boy after all. Tanner certainly seemed to be educated. His wife, Carol, hadn't said a word. It's really amazing how much we learn, or think we learn, about people by listening to them speak. When they left, we pulled the trailer up to the door and began collecting our supplies.

We finished loading and returned home with Kim driving. I backed the trailer up the driveway and we unloaded the food into the garage. Next, I pulled the Ma Deuce and put it in the garage. Finally, I lifted the hood and removed a wire that would keep the Hummer from starting. I locked up and we returned to the basement. The package I got at the PX was lying in the middle of my bed. Kim was silent throughout supper. I was getting more of the looking through me rather than looking at me.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I guess I'll stay, happy?"

"I would appreciate the company, yes."

"That's what I thought. You shower first tonight."

"Ok, no problem."

After supper, I got my shower and dressed. While Kim was in the shower, I put my package in one of the storage containers. I was reading more of my book when she came out of the bathroom, bare butt naked.

"Cover yourself."

"Why? I saw what you got at the PX. You didn't need to bother, I'm on the pill."

"That's way more information than I need to know. Please get some clothes on."

"You said I was attractive. You said you expected more out of me than hostility."

"You are, Kim. I was thinking about the future when I got those from the PX, they don't keep forever."

"Last chance."

"Get dressed."

Kim returned to the bathroom and donned the flannel night gown. When she came out, she had her chin held high, like she had accomplished something. If that was what I had wanted, I could have taken it or moved in on her the first time we talked about her being attractive. She hadn't been married, maybe she didn't know the difference between love and sex. If she didn't, that would be a real role reversal, usually it's men who don't know the difference.

Frankly, I was rather put off the next morning when she got up and dressed. If she could use the silent treatment, I was more than willing to play the game. I had breakfast ready and when she got up, fixed her pancakes. I put the plate and a bottle of Aunt Jemima on the table without a word. I buried my nose back in the book I was reading.

"Sorry."

"What's the deal, do you see horns protruding from my head?"

"I saw what you got and assumed that..."

"The problem with assume is that it makes an ass out of u and me. Do I find you attractive? Yes. Would I like to sleep with you? Maybe someday, but not yet. Are you obligated? No, you're not. And I'd never compare you to Michelle."

"Truce?"

"Do you agree to do what is necessary for us to survive?"

"Ok."

"Today we get you an education on the Browning Hi-Power pistol. That's the one you were carrying yesterday."

"If I mu... ok."

We spent most of the morning getting Kim familiar with the Browning. She found it more pleasant to shoot with the silencer so the majority of her target practice was done with the silencer on. After, we cleaned guns, again. I told her that most times a Browning design could get by without cleaning, but it was a good habit to practice. The side effect of having her clean the pistol was teaching her how to do it if she were on her own.

Kim – Chapter 3

"Do you want some lunch?"

"That would be good. Can you make tuna salad?"

"Do you have celery?"

"No, you'll have to substitute sweet pickle relish."

"It that good?"

"Celery is better, but it will do."

"It's a shame we don't have chips."

"I have an unopened bag upstairs. They may be on the stale side but the way they pack food these days, you never know."

"You get them while I make the tuna."

Ninety percent of all conversation borders on the mundane. In this instance, it was a learning process for both of us. I learned that she liked to use celery in her tuna salad and she learned that she could substitute sweet pickle relish. It's not all about her being buck naked or my getting condoms. We had an uneasy truce, for the moment. Only time would tell if it progressed beyond that. Her lack of subtlety the previous evening was a real put off; however, had she approach the same issue in a different manner I may well have succumbed. For some reason my mind had categorized Michelle as dead and not coming back and Kim as in the here and now.

After lunch, I asked if she were interesting in looking for a few additional food items.

"What did you have in mind?"

"There are some things you can never have too much of. We have plenty of ammo, one of those things, but we could stand more coffee and tea plus all the toilet paper we can find. I know that there are some feminine supplies, but you may have different preferences and we should get you what you want. You can check what we have and decide for yourself. I think there is an assortment, but that wasn't my bailiwick."

She blushed slightly then said, "Show me where they are."

I led her to the well stocked shelf that Michelle had set up and she simply nodded.

"Those will do if nothing else is available, but you're right, it's a personal thing. Coffee, tea, toilet paper and feminine supplies. Anything else you can think of Barry?"

"What kind of soda do you like?"

"Coke or Pepsi, it's all the same."

"In a pig's eye. We'll get both, I'm a Coke fan but would drink Pepsi if there was nothing else. Do you drink? I don't have much liquor here but it might come in handy to let off steam or wash out a wound if we run out of alcohol."

"I drink occasionally, usually white wine if I'm on a date or a margarita if I'm out with the girls. I suppose you're a bourbon and branch man."

"I like margaritas too. I also have been known to drink a Martini, a Manhattan, blended scotch and bourbon of course."

"It won't take a lot of booze will it? Your storage space seems to be filling."

"No, we'll get an assortment and some mixes for when we both want a drink. You don't have a problem with alcohol, do you?"

"If you're asking am I a drunk, the answer is no. I rarely drink more than one or two drinks and more often than not, it's white wine."

"Would red be okay to go with red meat?"

"If you wish, but there is no rule that says you have to drink white wine with fish and red wine with beef."

"Wait, we should find a pharmacy and stock up on antibiotics, bandages and pain killers. We haven't seen anyone remotely approaching a medical professional."

"That's quite the combination, booze and drugs."

"At different times and for different purposes. But yes, I see how it could sound."

o

"Where to?"

"Let's try Rite Aid first. They generally have Spam and Dak hams in addition to the meds."

After a short drive we arrived at a Rite Aid store and ended up breaking in, a good sign. We each took a cart and while she went for feminine supplies and bandages, I concentrated on the food. We parked our full carts near the front of the store, got additional carts and started back for more. I couldn't get through the locked pharmacy door with

my pry bar and went to the Hummer to get my 590A1 and some breeching rounds.

Still, it took two shots to get the door open but once inside, we carefully went from shelf to shelf getting antibiotics, pain killers, some more esoteric meds and even some morning after pills. I did notice that she took all of the birth control pills that she said she used and they had in stock. We actually had done rather well at Rite Aid and probably wouldn't need to go to another pharmacy. We then returned to Sam's Club for the paper products, cola, coffee and tea. I should have used the pickup, we couldn't haul much.

It didn't take long to unload when we got home and I swapped the trailer hitch for my pickup's ball mount and we went back. Toilet paper is very bulky but light in weight. I had a tarp and tie down straps this trip so we could bring back more. We also finished off all of two brands of coffee, leaving the rest, and all the cola we could find. I think that the only brand of tea most stores carry is Lipton or Bigelow and we took it all. Kim added to her personal supplies and we decided to call it a day after one final stop, the liquor store.

"Not half bad, I think we're getting very well stocked."

"Barry, we could live on the food you have for several years."

"We have, Kim."

"Oh, so now I'm included?"

"Yes and let me tell you something. Had you approached that matter last night differently, things might have happened."

"Is that a big change in attitude?"

"Call it a mellowing. What happened was very unromantic. Had you dug around a bit more in that blue box, you would have found some nice lingerie. People need to feel wanted."

"So now you want me."

"I didn't say I didn't want you last night. It starts with a cuddle, maybe progresses to a kiss and moves on beyond that. You standing there naked wasn't a turn off but it reflected badly on your understanding of the situation."

o

Women in general don't have the urgent need that most men have. That is not a blanket statement, it depends on the woman. To this point she hadn't evidenced having such a need. Rather, her previous night's behavior was probably directed towards avoiding my kicking her out. My mind was made up, right or wrong, good or bad, Kim got with the

program or got gone. Was her apology sincere and did her learning to use the Browning reflect well on her or was it a ploy? Time would tell and by any measure time was short, we'd only found one family so far, what about the others?

"You've told me very little about yourself."

"What do you want to know?"

"You might start by telling me your age. Give me some of your background, education, the work you did. You know, let me get to know you."

"You should know better than to ask a woman her age, but I'm 23, close to 24. I'm a city girl, never lived on a farm. After High School, I went to college and got a degree in liberal arts. Turned out to be a worthless degree, I ended up as a secretary for a law firm. I've dated some, but never found Mr. Right. I already told you I was home with the stomach flu when the end came. What about you?"

"Like I told you, I'm 29. Went into the Army out of High School. Did my time and got out. Went to tech school and got a job in security. I met Michelle, we dated for two years and then got married. I was armed security, mostly guarding bonded shipments."

"Rent-a-cop?"

"Yes, some called us that, I find it offensive."

"No offense."

"None taken. So, you were looking for Mr. Right?"

"It wasn't an active pursuit, I dated. I'm not a virgin. What is it with guys these days, they take you out to dinner or to a show and expect payment?"

"Not every man is like that."

"The ones I met were."

"Did you look around your church for available men?"

"I didn't attend regularly, and no, the thought never occurred to me."

"If you had, you may have found a man more to your liking whose first order of business wasn't to get into your pants. Enough of getting to know each other, we found our first family of survivors. Any thoughts on the subject?"

"We only found one."

"If one other family survived, there's sure to be more. I believe that we'll find them by keeping an eye on the grocery stores. Preppers would probably flock to the stores to round out their LTS foods and others, people like you, would have run out of food and had to go to a grocery store. In the aftermath of an event like this, gun stores, drug stores, grocery stores would be high on peoples' lists."

"Is there going to be a lot of radiation sickness?"

"I didn't have a remote monitor, a CD V-717. All I had was a hand held monitor, a CD V-715. I also had a spreadsheet created by a fella called TOM and was able to use it backwards to determine the peak radiation. It didn't get that high, around 100 Rads per hour. Depending on how people were sheltered, many should have survived."

"How do you know all these things?"

"I spent a lot of time on the internet learning. The war was predictable, once someone started the ball rolling. Too many hot spots around the world, for one thing. Too long since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for another. Too many countries trying to get nuclear weapons and nobody able to stop them."

"What now?"

"It will never be the same, not in our lifetimes. There were simply too many things destroyed. We'll learn to grow our own food and revert to a more agrarian society in the near term. We may end up with horses and buggies if there isn't enough fuel and the vehicles wear out. The last running vehicles will probably be Hummers because they'll run on any fuel and there are hundreds of thousands of gallons of jet fuel stored. When they wear out, we'll be on foot or on horse."

"I ride, you know."

"Another thing I've learned about you. My uncle lived on a farm. I used to go out to my cousin's and ride too."

"Could we go there? To the farm?"

"He sold it when he retired because my cousin became an engineer. It would have been nice if we could. Back to my question, how do you feel about hooking up with the other family?"

"I know nothing about them. I guess I'll follow your lead. You don't plan to put them up here, do you?"

"No, there are probably several empty homes in the neighborhood. People at work, kids in schools, women out shopping. I thought we'd wait until we started checking out the homes."

"Why?"

"There's been no sign of activity. I wouldn't want to break into a home and get shot for my trouble."

"You think they'd shoot you?"

"Ever heard the expression, *shoot first and ask questions later?*"

"I've heard it, but never thought about it. As far as those people, the Tanner's, go; as long as they wouldn't be living in the same house, I have no problem with them."

"I have one more question. Is your name Kim or Kimberly?"

"Kimberly, but I always go by Kim."

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She half smiled when I asked; did I finally break the ice? Kim had shoulder length hair, but without a beauty shop to get it cut, would she grow it longer? Michelle had gone to the beauty shop to get them to cut off the split ends, but over time, her hair had grown to somewhere between mid back and her waist. I cut my own hair and Michelle had trimmed the edges for me, giving me an acceptable looking butch.

When she finished brushing her hair after breakfast, we set out to check on other stores. Kim said she didn't have much in the way of casual wear at home and there were enough empty stores she could get everything she'd want. We went to a large department store and both got several pairs of jeans, hers were slightly larger than the ones out of the blue box, long sleeved shirts, good work shoes, sneakers, socks, underwear and coats.

Next, we went to a grocery store and loaded up on more toilet paper, feminine supplies, beans, rice, pasta, coffee and tea. I was thinking that I'd have to park my pickup outside because we'd have one full garage stall of the toilet paper. It was a 3 stall garage and we already had one stall full of ammo and a second stall was accumulating paper products. The third stall held our growing pile of LTS foods.

"That should take care of it for a while. Now, we're out of storage space. Did you find everything you wanted at the department store?"

"Casual clothes, yes. I wouldn't have minded finding a good dress in my size."

"You couldn't?"

"Hard to shop with only a Maglite for illumination. We might run by my place later, I have

several dresses and suits."

"That reminds me. We haven't picked up any extra batteries. I'll put them at the top of our shopping list. We can look for 6 volt lanterns so you'll have enough light to shop."

"You mean there's something you don't have?"

"I have one 2 AAA-cell Maglite, four 2 AA-cell Maglites, one 2 D-cell Maglite and three 3 D-cell Maglites, but no 6 volt lanterns."

"We didn't see any other people today. Are you really sure there are more?"

"There have to be more. I told you the radiation level and this isn't a place like California where they build slab houses. Everyone has a basement and can shelter in place. The problem would be that people went out looking for their missing loved ones right at the radiation peak. If they spent much time looking, they could have gotten a lethal dose."

"Tell me more."

"Ok, dose-equivalents are presently stated in sieverts:

"0.05–0.2 Sv (5–20 REM)

"No symptoms. Potential for cancer and mutation of genetic material, according to the LNT model: this is disputed. A few researchers contend that low dose radiation may be beneficial. 50 mSv is the yearly federal limit for radiation workers in the United States. In the UK the yearly limit for a classified radiation worker is 20 mSv. In Canada, the single-year maximum is 50 mSv, but the maximum 5-year dose is only 100 mSv. Company limits are usually stricter so as not to violate federal limits.

"0.2–0.5 Sv (20–50 REM)

"No noticeable symptoms. Red blood cell count decreases temporarily.

"0.5–1 Sv (50–100 REM)

"Mild radiation sickness with headache and increased risk of infection due to disruption of immunity cells. Temporary male sterility is possible.

"1–2 Sv (100–200 REM)

"Light radiation poisoning, 10% fatality after 30 days (LD 10/30). Typical symptoms include mild to moderate nausea (50% probability at 2 Sv), with occasional vomiting, beginning 3 to 6 hours after irradiation and lasting for up to one day. This is followed by a 10 to 14 day latent phase, after which light symptoms like general illness and fatigue appear (50% probability at 2 Sv). The immune system is depressed, with convales-

cence extended and increased risk of infection. Temporary male sterility is common. Spontaneous abortion or stillbirth will occur in pregnant women.

"2–3 Sv (200–300 REM)

"Moderate radiation poisoning, 35% fatality after 30 days (LD 35/30). Nausea is common (100% at 3 Sv), with 50% risk of vomiting at 2.8 Sv. Symptoms onset at 1 to 6 hours after irradiation and last for 1 to 2 days. After that, there is a 7 to 14 day latent phase, after which the following symptoms appear: loss of hair all over the body (50% probability at 3 Sv), fatigue and general illness. There is a massive loss of leukocytes (white blood cells), greatly increasing the risk of infection. Permanent female sterility is possible. Convalescence takes one to several months.

"3–4 Sv (300–400 REM)

"Severe radiation poisoning, 50% fatality after 30 days (LD 50/30). Other symptoms are similar to the 2–3 Sv dose, with uncontrollable bleeding in the mouth, under the skin and in the kidneys (50% probability at 4 Sv) after the latent phase.

"4–6 Sv (400–600 REM)

"Acute radiation poisoning, 60% fatality after 30 days (LD 60/30). Fatality increases from 60% at 4.5 Sv to 90% at 6 Sv (unless there is intense medical care). Symptoms start half an hour to two hours after irradiation and last for up to 2 days. After that, there is a 7 to 14 day latent phase, after which generally the same symptoms appear as with 3-4 Sv irradiation, with increased intensity. Female sterility is common at this point. Convalescence takes several months to a year. The primary causes of death (in general 2 to 12 weeks after irradiation) are infections and internal bleeding.

"6–10 Sv (600–1,000 REM)

"Acute radiation poisoning, near 100% fatality after 14 days (LD 100/14). Survival depends on intense medical care. Bone marrow is nearly or completely destroyed, so a bone marrow transplant is required. Gastric and intestinal tissue are severely damaged. Symptoms start 15 to 30 minutes after irradiation and last for up to 2 days. Subsequently, there is a 5 to 10 day latent phase, after which the person dies of infection or internal bleeding. Recovery would take several years and probably would never be complete.

"10–50 Sv (1,000–5,000 REM)

"Acute radiation poisoning, 100% fatality after 7 days (LD 100/7). An exposure this high leads to spontaneous symptoms after 5 to 30 minutes. After powerful fatigue and immediate nausea caused by direct activation of chemical receptors in the brain by the irradiation, there is a period of several days of comparative well-being, called the latent (or 'walking ghost') phase. After that, cell death in the gastric and intestinal tissue, causing massive diarrhea, intestinal bleeding and loss of water, leads to water-electrolyte imbal-

ance. Death sets in with delirium and coma due to breakdown of circulation. Death is currently inevitable; the only treatment that can be offered is pain therapy."

"Now you know, feel any better?"

"It's hard to believe that two or three hours could make that much difference."

"What do you mean."

"You said the radiation peaked at 100 R/hr. Someone out for 3 hours would have about a 35% chance of dying while someone out for 6 hours would have a 50% chance of dying."

"If it were only that simple, Kim. The radiation is decaying once it reaches peak level. It's called the seven-ten rule and for every seventh passage of time the radiation decays by 90%. Let me give you an example. If the peak level were 100 Rads, after 7 hours, it would be at 10 Rads, and at seven times seven hours or 49 hours, 1 Rad. At seven times seven times seven hours or 343 hours, that's about two weeks, it would be at 100 milli Rad. The maximum walking around level is around 100 milli Rad and that's why I think you're ok."

"Oh, I thought it was my dimples."

Kim – Chapter 4

"Don't be flip. But, your dimples are cute."

"You really think so?"

"As a matter of fact, I do."

"Leftover tuna salad sandwiches ok for lunch?"

"Sure. Coke or Pepsi?"

"Pepsi."

We finished off the leftover tuna salad and chips and I learned one more thing about Kim, she preferred Pepsi. While that might not be important to some, it meant I had the Coke to myself and she could have all of the Pepsi. After lunch, she looked in the freezer and took out a small beef roast to bake. It being frozen would add some cooking time, but a regular meal would be nice for a change. I still had some carrots and a bag of potatoes so we could have a complete meal.

"I can't stand to wear new jeans. I'm going to run them through the washer and dryer. Do you want me to wash yours?"

"Please. There are more in the hamper, the things I've worn recently."

"I might just as well do all the laundry. I'm not going to run out of gas halfway through, am I?"

"No, it's a 500 plus gallon tank. Another thing to add to the list with the batteries, propane."

It was January if you haven't already figured that out. I'd had the propane topped off the week before Christmas. I had also added diesel to the generator's tank and refilled my cans. I was estimating that we were close to the bottom 25% of the generator output meaning one gallon per hour. That tank was larger, 2,000-gallons and it should still be more than half full.

Our propane company used a 3,000-gallon truck for deliveries. If I could locate it and fill it, we'd be set for a while. I got the diesel from Chevron home delivery and I know where their tank farm was. I might be able to find a delivery truck, or if I were lucky, a tanker. A full tanker would keep us in power for the better part of a year.

It was my turn to blush when Kim came back from the dryer with a basket full of whites and proceeded to fold my underwear. It would seem that she preferred bikinis and very lacy bras. I had seen her fully dressed and totally naked but not in between and that's

when, IMHO, a woman is at her sexiest.

"I guess we're revealing secrets."

"What do you mean?"

"You like jockeys and I like bikinis and lacy bras. Trying to visualize me in them?"

"It wouldn't take much imagination. Anyway, I was thinking and we need to locate fuel supplies in addition to the batteries. How about we go looking tomorrow?"

"Your shirts are in the dryer and the jeans are in the washer, so the laundry should be done by supper. Looking for fuel? Sure, why not?"

It was obvious that we were both dancing around subjects involving sex. I was becoming less opposed as time passed. That was her call, not mine. I'd wait until she said something like, "Maverick, you big stud, take me to bed or lose me forever."

After dinner, she showered first and came out wearing the flannel nightgown. I showered and redressed in clean clothes. Kim was sound asleep so I turned down the lights and picked up my book to read a few more chapters. It's ironic, I was reading *War and Peace* and was in Book 2.

I actually fell asleep reading and woke up around midnight. I went upstairs and checked the doors, they were already locked, and turned in. I had trouble getting back to sleep, at first, visions of lacy bras and bikini bottoms were dancing in my head. I woke around 5:30 and found Kim was already up, dressed and her hair brushed out. She had coffee made and asked if pancakes were ok. I told her to give me 20 minutes to clean up and we'd eat together.

"Do you plan to get a delivery truck and refill your propane tank?"

"Yes, but, I'll keep the truck. They hold from 1,000 to 3,000 gallons and our tank only holds 500. As far as the diesel fuel goes, I know where their tank farm is and may get lucky and find a tanker. That would keep us in fuel for most of a year. I have 10 gallons of PRI-D. That's enough for about 20,000-gallons."

"How much does a tanker hold?"

"That depends. A large single tank probably around 9,000-gallons. A double tanker maybe 16,000-gallons, eight in each tank. It depends on which state the trailers run in, because of weight limits and other regulations. Sometimes it even depends on the county the truck runs in. Down in Australia, they run road trains, triple and sometimes quadruple units. Some triples were run in Canada and interior western states."

"In other words, it depends."

"That's right, Kim. We'll get the largest we can find."

"What are you going to do when you run out of that PRI stuff?"

"You can generally find it at a marina; we might go looking at the lake. Eventually, it won't matter because the generator will wear out. That's why we have oil lamps."

"So no matter what we do, we're going to end up without electricity?"

"Offhand, I think any time after two years; we'll either have to find alternative sources of energy or do without."

"Ewww. How 19th century."

"That's about right, 19th century before Thomas Edison."

"What about the vehicles? You said the Hummer would last."

"As long as we can find parts and I can keep the vehicles running, we don't absolutely have to ride horses. We will have to look around and find what we need for the future while we have operating vehicles. Are you ready to go?"

"Yeah, just let me get my web gear."

Hmm, no more do I have to use a gun. No more do I have to carry that. Shades of Bob Dylan, the times were a changing. I also noticed that she was looking at me again, rather than looking through me. Moreover, she seemed to be interested in learning how to cope with Hell on Earth.

We went after the propane first. I found the truck and determined that the tank held very little propane. When I checked, electricity was required to pump the propane into the truck.

"We're going to have to go and find a portable generator. We'll try the rental place, they have several sizes."

"Do they have propane?"

"Yes, there's propane in the large tank. The delivery truck is nearly empty and we need power to pump more."

The rental place had been broken into and ransacked. The only generator I could find was a very large portable. I checked the fuel tank and it had diesel. It was a struggle but I got it on the back of the pickup. It being an electrical start model didn't help, it had a large battery. We returned to the propane company and I wired the generator into the

pump. It was downhill after that, just waiting while the truck filled. When the truck was full, I shut down the pump and disconnected the generator. Maybe I'd have to pump diesel at the tank farm. Kim drove the pickup and I drove the delivery truck. When we got home, I parked the delivery truck within hose length of the storage tank and we went downstairs for a Coke.

"Is it going to be like that every time?"

"I think so. If we could find more generators, we could wire one in permanently every place we need one."

"Do you want lunch?"

"Thanks, but I'd rather get the diesel fuel and then have a nice dinner. How does steak sound?"

"It sounds good."

We found a Chevron tanker loaded with fuel and a trip ticket. The driver was headed out to deliver the load at a truck stop when the balloon went up. I'd never driven a semi and had to struggle to get the truck to the house, then struggle even more to get it all in the backyard.

It had been a good day and the steaks were thawed so Kim scrubbed two potatoes and put them in the oven. We'd have to settle for pan fried steak because it was too cold to start the charcoal grill. I'd gotten dirty manhandling the generator and left to take a shower. I forgot to take a clean pair of pants and shirt with me, so when I was done, I came out wearing a robe.

"Sorry, I forgot to take clean clothes into the bathroom, I'll change."

"Don't bother on my account. The potatoes still have 30 minutes to go, I think I'll get a shower too. Find a can of mushrooms if you have them."

That was easy, there was a case of sliced mushrooms on the shelf for use on pizza, sautéed with steaks, added to spaghetti sauce and so forth. She came out about the time the potatoes were getting done and was also dressed in a robe.

"My night gown is in the dryer. I'll change after we eat."

She changed all right, but wasn't into the flannel nightgown nor was it into any of the more exotic lingerie in the blue tub, but into a nightie. I got dressed and sat down to read my book.

"What are you reading?"

"*War and Peace* by Tolstoy."

"That's a long one, right?"

"Four books and two epilogues."

"It's a romance, isn't it?"

"It depicts a huge cast of characters, both historical and fictional, Russians and non-Russians, the majority of whom are introduced in the first book. The scope of the novel is extremely vast, but the narration focuses mainly on five or six characters whose differing personalities and experiences provide the impetus to the story with their mutual interactions leading up to, around and following the Napoleonic war. I'm at the part where Nikolai returns home to find the Rostov family facing financial ruin due to poor estate management. He spends an eventful winter home, finding Natasha blossoming into a beautiful young girl."

"Sounds like a romance to me."

"It's much more than that. We're talking about events leading up to and during the French Invasion of Russia during 1812. It's sometimes referred to as the Patriotic War or as the War of 1812, but that's confusing since we had our own War of 1812 with the British."

"Is that all men think about is war?"

"No, I didn't mean it that way. Tolstoy centered his story around the war. The story is more about the people. I suppose in some respects, it is romantic. His other novel, *Anna Karenina*, is definitely a romance, though tragic."

"What's on the agenda for tomorrow?"

"Nothing, you can sleep in."

"That's funny, I'm not sleepy."

"Forgive if I'm wrong. Is that why you wore the nightie instead of the flannel nightgown?"

"What are you suggesting?"

"The flannel nightgown is rather shapeless while that nightie doesn't hide much."

"It doesn't does it? To answer your question, I didn't much care for that flannel bag and found this in the blue box. If I had wanted to try something, I would have worn that other skimpy transparent thing. I can change if you want."

"All right let's clear this up. If you want to change because you want to, do it. You'll probably get the normal male reaction out of me. Kim, you don't owe me anything. You are an attractive young woman. The other night when you came out like that, I took it to mean that you were doing it because you thought I expected it. I don't and that should be clear. It's your decision, not mine, to make."

"You read your book, I'll be back."

The skimpy transparent thing didn't hide a thing, but oh, was it sexy. And, we both slept in.

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"I think it's safe to move upstairs. Don't forget, we have to meet up with the Tanner's tomorrow."

"Your wife was a very lucky woman."

"What's that make you?"

"Lucky woman number 2?"

"Then I guess that makes me twice blessed. I'm glad we got that out of the way, I'll admit to being tempted, but it had to be your call."

"I don't see why, there aren't any cops I could have reported a rape to. Breakfast?"

"No, there don't appear to be any cops, but I've taught you to shoot. Breakfast? It's closer to lunchtime. Let's wait a bit and have brunch."

"How about a fruit salad and quiche? There's some ham I can add and cheese. It won't be Quiche Lorraine, but I like it."

"Sounds good. There are cans of mixed fruit on the shelf or individual fruits if you prefer."

"I'll figure it out, you go top off the propane and diesel tanks."

Liquid propane is very cold, at least -44°F. I had to be careful topping off the propane tanks. The diesel tank was easier with that large hose that transports come with. I returned and washed up just as Kim was taking the Quiche out of the oven. She had used mixed fruit and topped it with Dream Whip.

"Wow, she can cook too."

"You like?"

"Yes."

"Me or the quiche?"

"Both."

After breakfast we spent the rest of the day cleaning the upstairs. Our house, a 3 bedroom ranch style home, had been built as a retirement home by a couple who must have liked space. Most 3 bedroom tract homes have a larger master bedroom and 2 smaller, children's rooms. This home had an extra large master bedroom and two guest bedrooms the size of most master bedrooms. There were other built in amenities including an unused wet bar complete with carbon dioxide system for keg beer and so forth.

Michelle and I bought glasses for the bar when we could find them, mostly for appearances sake. She had hated them because, unused, they still required periodic washing. Bar stock usually consisted of 4 bottles of wine and a six pack of beer. Normally, we only drank when we went out for an occasional dinner. At least with the assortment from the liquor store, I could stock the bar.

Over the past four weeks a coat of dust built up and out of caution, I checked it with the CD V-715 to make sure it wasn't radioactive. If it was, it was very low, you can't trust the upper and lower 10% of the range on the survey meters. Kim dug right in, stripping the bed and putting the sheets, mattress pad and bed cover in the laundry. I helped her remake the king sized bed using spare sheets and such from the linen closet. We worked one room at a time, dusting, vacuuming, picking up and putting the house in order.

We saved the kitchen for last and she put the few dirty dishes with the badly crusted on food in the dishwasher after soaking them for a bit. The lady was a clean freak and she cleaned everything down to the shine. Unlike most homes these days, this home had a fairly large pantry off the kitchen. When we were done cleaning, we restocked the pantry and made a list of things to find at the grocery to round out our supplies. Things that would eventually go bad if they weren't used up. That was about all we hadn't picked up on our various trips because we concentrated on LTS foods.

You did notice that it is now our and not my. When she decided, she went for it whole hog. I'll give her credit; she overcame her dislike of guns and now always had the Browning handy in a paddle holster. She also wore 4 spare 13-round magazines on her left side in a pair of double magazine pouches.

"I'm exhausted."

"You should be, lady, the house looks perfect."

"What do you want to do for supper?"

"How about we get a pizza out of the freezer and wash it down with a beer?"

"I don't much care for frozen pizza."

"DiGiorno Ultimate Supreme? There are all four different flavors."

"Oh the expensive stuff. That's different."

"You pick one, I like them all."

"I'll be right back."

I had another thing to add to our supplies, more motor oil for the generator, I had two full cases of filters, 24 to the case, but only 3 cases of oil. Changing the oil every 100 or so hours was a real pain in the butt although necessary to insure the longevity of the generator. Had it been possible, we'd have had a second, identical generator so we could switch off and basically double the life of our power generation. Besides, I could let the generator cool off before I changed the oil.

The dealer was located in the next town over, though I didn't know if he'd have another generator like ours in stock. They're rather high ticket items and he'd had to order ours. More recently, he'd stocked a few due to an increasing demand caused by the general unrest. I'd add that to my to-do list.

My list now included batteries, motor oil, second generator if possible, more filters of all types plus the groceries we need to fill in the pantry, with extras. We'd probably do that at Sam's Club when we met up with the Tanner's tomorrow. Since I had to go to the generator dealer anyway to pick up the filters, it wouldn't be a special trip looking for a second generator.

"Four meat ok with you?"

"I like them all. I started the oven for you."

"It's not hot yet. I'll take that beer if you have a cold one."

"In the fridge in the wet bar, hang on, I'll get us both one."

"Tanner's tomorrow?"

"That's right. We can probably get more of the grocery items at Sam's Club. We need those batteries I mentioned and I thought we'd run over to the generator dealer in the next town to get filters, oil and possibly a second generator. It should be simple enough to wire in with a heavy duty triple pole double throw switch, maybe a make-before-break style so we never lose power."

"If you say so, is that a guy thing?"

"I don't know, it basic electrical wiring."

"I might understand if you show me."

"I can tell you how it will work if we install a second generator. Both generators will be connected to the switch with only one running. When it's time to shut down one to change the oil, we'd start the other one and when it's stabilized, flip the switch, changing our power source. Then we can shut down the first generator and let it cool off before I have to change the oil. We'll let the second generator run until it's time to change its oil then reverse the process."

"So, if my guess is right, we'd have power for four years instead of two?"

"All other things being equal, yes."

"Now all you need to do is find some spare parts kits so someone can rebuild the engines on the generators."

"I'm not a diesel engine mechanic."

"No, but if you're right about there being more survivors, we might find one."

Kim – Chapter 5

It was like being on a second honeymoon; the same, yet different. I avoided making comparisons, but some were unavoidable. Kim was more of a free spirit with a different mindset. Plus, we were new to each other and had much to learn. The bunks in the basement, being only intended for short term use were a narrow 30". The king sized bed was a full 78" wide.

We both woke around 5am and I let her use the bathroom first. Next, I showered, shaved and dressed in clean clothes. I went to the kitchen looking for something to put together for breakfast while Kim showered. She had the coffee on, that was nice. I whipped some dehydrated whole eggs into scrambled eggs and fried some bacon. She came down and I started the eggs while she had a cup of coffee.

"This is good, but we don't have any toast."

"I'll get a frozen loaf out of the freezer and put it in a pan to thaw and rise. We can bake it when we get home."

"I thought I'd have to bake bread. I've never done that, is it hard?"

"More work, certainly, but not hard. It's typical to bake enough bread for a week at one time. There is generally enough dough leftover for a pan of cinnamon rolls; or you can bake an extra loaf or even some buns. I can help."

"What time do we meet up with the Tanner's?"

"Early afternoon."

"Want to go check on the generator, before we meet them?"

"Good idea. We'll take the Hummer and the trailer. It will only take a couple of minutes to change the hitch."

"Explain."

"The military uses a pintle hitch while civilians use a ball hitch with balls of various sizes depending on what's being towed. The hitch on my trailer tongue can be changed by removing two bolts and inserting the other type hitch. I have both. If I can find one, I may replace the hitch on the Hummer with a combination ball/pintle."

"Do you preplan everything?"

"If I did, we'd have had two generators. Considering what they cost, we were lucky to have one. At the moment, the price is right so we'll get a second if we can find it. Did you know that the diesel tanks they use at truck stops are massive when compared to

the diesel tanks you find in the average gas station? They hold 40,000-gallons compared to the 10,000 most gas station have. If we go to a truck stop, we should find a virtually unlimited supply of diesel."

"Isn't there a nearly unlimited supply at the tank farm?"

"Yes, but it's nice to have options."

On the way to the generator place, my words began to haunt me, "It's nice to have options." There were other power sources, solar and wind, if we could locate them. They were mostly DC systems that stored the spare energy in batteries and converted it to AC using inverters. Something else to add to my growing list. I'd read somewhere that either golf cart or gel-cell batteries were the best to use for this purpose. Maybe some gel-cell golf cart batteries? I'd better not get the cart before the horse.

We pulled into the dealer's parking lot and parked. The building was locked up tight, always a good sign. It didn't take a lot to gain entry and once inside I began looking at the generators on the showroom floor. These were all either natural gas or propane, disappointing. Kim, meanwhile had gone into the large backroom/warehouse. She came out and asked, "Find what you want?"

"Not really."

"There are a lot more in the backroom and some are big ones."

"Let's look."

There sat 3 of the Cummins DG series generators. One of the three was the same model as the one we already had. I unlocked the chain driven back door and pulled it open. Next, I went to the Hummer and pulled it around back. Understand, a generator like this weighs just short of a half ton, there would be no manhandling it into the trailer. However, there was a forklift inside and a second outside. I used the former to move the generator to the loading dock and the latter to lower it to ground level. Next, I unhooked the trailer and Kim held up the tongue while I loaded the generator. It was easy as 1-2-3.

I returned for the filters and motor oil. He didn't have much motor oil in stock so I decided we needed to go to an auto parts store. Given a choice I generally opt for Castrol oil. It takes about ½ case of oil for this size generator. If we could, I really rather find it in bulk, 55-gallon drums.

I made note of the remaining generators, especially the diesel and propane. We didn't have any trouble at the auto parts store and I even found more filters that would work. However, when we stopped at a lubrication shop looking for oil drums, TSHTF.

"Did you find any?"

"Would you believe it, 6 full drums and 3 part drums. We'll have to come back, I can't get them on the trailer because the generator is in the way."

"We really should be going. By the time we go home and unload everything it will be time to meet up with the Tanner family."

"Ok, you drive Kim and I'll take the gunner's position."

BAMM, BAMM, BAMM.

Three separate shots not a three round burst. I saw Kim drop her HK416 and grab her left arm.

"Get down. Try to get behind the trailer."

"I'm shot."

"How bad is it?"

"How bad does it have to be?"

"Hang on, I think I see him. If you can use your pistol, putting down suppressing fire."

"Two questions. What is suppressing fire and where is he?"

"Suppressive fire differs from lethal fire in that its primary objective is to get the enemy to keep their heads down and thus reduce their ability to move, shoot, or observe their surroundings. While soldiers may be injured or killed by suppressive fire, this is not its main purpose. He's on the roof of the second building over on the other side of the trailer."

"In other words, spray and pray."

"Exactly."

"I see him. Go ahead, I'll start spraying."

I flanked him until I was out of his line of sight. Then, I was able to move to the entrance of the building. It was only a two story with a flat roof. I'd be ok if I could get to the roof unobserved. It took me a minute or two to locate the roof access and I crept up the stairs and tried to open the door quietly. The hinges squeaked, but he appeared not to notice. I decided that at this range, my .45 would be the weapon of choice. I burst through the open door and right into his line of fire.

BAMM, BAMM, BAMM, he fired.

BAMM, BAMM, BAMM, I fired.

My aim was better and he took three in the chest. I didn't escape his shots, taking one in my upper right arm. Beats the hell out of being dead. I looked and his weapons weren't worth taking so I returned to Kim.

"You're shot."

"No kidding. He's dead. Let me bandage your wound and then you can bandage mine."

"Now you see why I don't like guns."

"If we hadn't have had guns, we'd probably both be dead."

I cut her shirt sleeve off at the shoulder and observed a grazing wound. It wasn't bad at all, but had to hurt.

"There's that. Yuck, that's going to leave an awful scar."

"It just a graze. You're barely bleeding. I put on a battle dressing and then you can check my wound."

"Thanks," she said after I put a large Band-Aid on her wound. She proceeded to remove my shirt sleeve at the shoulder level and to check my wound.

I could see that it went through the triceps and was a through and through. It was bleeding but not profusely suggesting that no major veins or arteries had been hit.

"You'll have to debride that and bandage both the entrance and the exit holes."

"Are you proposing?"

"Debride is the medical term for cleaning out a wound. You will have to use the supplies in the first aid kit to clean the debris from the wound so I don't get infected."

"This is going to hurt."

"Yeah, I figured. It won't be much worse than the wound is now."

That's the last thing I remember until I came to a few minutes after she finished cleaning the wound. Kim told me that as soon as she inserted the long swab, I passed out. I'll admit, I don't remember a thing. She explained what she'd done to clean the wound, prevent infection and even the suturing and bandaging part.

"We make quite pair. Matching arms when we're facing each other."

"I don't know if I did the stitching right."

"I never done it either, so it must be fine."

"We're going to have to go straight to Sam's Club."

"Like I said before we were so rudely interrupted, you drive and I'll take the gunner's seat."

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"You back."

"Hello Mr. Tanner."

"You're both hurt."

"Shot up a little, nothing life threatening."

"Anything I can do to help?"

"We have a short grocery list and I'd really appreciate it if you could help me get it gathered up and in the trailer."

"No problem. Is that a generator on the trailer?"

"Yes. It's a ~30kw diesel."

"Man, would I like to have one of those."

"There are more where that came from. I can show you tomorrow if you like."

"I have a large propane tank. The box says diesel."

"They have both."

"Let's get your groceries and sit a spell."

We four adults gathered and packed while Caleb stood guard. Then, we pulled up four chairs and sat down to discuss the matter of them moving.

"That looks like it smarts."

"Something awful. I have some pain pills at home I can take when we get there."

"As far as the question of our moving goes, I'm not so sure we want to. We're in a small housing development with barely 16 houses. There must be another family there because I can hear a generator running."

"You haven't checked?"

"They might shoot first and ask questions later."

"What's your address?"

"We're on Elm Place."

I started to laugh. "Mr. Tanner, that my generator you hear running. I hadn't checked the other houses in the neighborhood for the same reason you gave. We're neighbors."

"Well, I'll be."

"You know, it wouldn't take much to secure our neighborhood, just a gate across the entrance to the tract."

"You know Simpson I saw that Hummer but it never dawned on me that it might be you. I thought maybe it was someone from the National Guard post."

"That's where we got the Hummer. The only reason I got it was I wanted a Ma Deuce."

"Well armed, are you?"

"Fairly well armed yes. Not a lot of extras, but there are many more at the gun store."

"As you can see, we have an SKS. Don't much care for it, but it was cheap and the ammo was pretty cheap."

"Since we're neighbors, how about I lead you to the gun store and you can get some better firearms? I cleaned out the ammo, but I have a lot, plenty to share. I don't suppose you were in the military, were you?"

"Army, four years, late '80s to early '90s, infantry, Desert Storm. Don't much care for that M16 or the M9."

"Would you rather have a main battle rifle?"

"M14?"

"That's what I had in mind, yes. Maybe the best of both worlds, an HK417 20" sniper model."

"You'll have to show me, I don't know the weapon. The NATO 7.62 is a fine cartridge, better than the Russian 7.62x39mm."

"Let's go, we can talk more when we get home."

Nelson looked at all the rifles and shotguns in the gun safe and picked three 590A1s, a HK417 and a HK416. For handguns, he selected two, a Browning and a Kimber Classic Custom II. He got magazines for the rifles and handguns and I told him I'd load him up on ammo when we got home.

"How are you going to get the generator off the trailer?"

"I hadn't given it much thought, Nelson. I suppose I planned to attach a chain and drive the trailer out from underneath. I want to set it close to the other generator so I don't run much plumbing or wiring."

"Do you have pipes?"

"No. I don't have the wiring either but I did come up with a heavy duty triple pole double throw switch, make-before-break style."

"Barry, I tinker. I think I have the wire and pipe you need to get that up and running. Let me measure and I'll go check."

"If you leave Caleb here, I'll get him started hauling that ammo."

"Caleb, come here boy. Now you do exactly what Mr. Simpson tells you to do. He is going to give you some boxes to haul to our place. Stack them in the garage. Do you understand?"

"Yes, pa, take the boxes and stack them in the garage."

I figured Caleb wasn't really retarded, probably more like borderline retarded. People so classified generally have an IQ between 70 and 79. They were highly functional as long as they had proper instruction and with time, they might outgrow the condition. Tend to not be able to use contractions. When called upon to do so, they could make decisions on their own. Not always right, but the same applies to all of us. I felt sorry for Caleb lugging the ammo boxes and supplied a 2 wheeled cart to ease his task. He could get all the ammo I intended to give them in two trips.

Nelson came back with a roll of heavy cable and several pieces of pipe and fittings. He marked where he wanted the generator to rest, then hooked on a log chain and slipped the generator off the trailer neat as can be. It was almost exactly where he wanted it. He shut down the generator, turned off the fuel supply and in 30 minutes had the tank connect to the generator. He turned the tank back on to check for leaks and finding none, mounted the TPDT switch right next to the ATS. In another thirty minutes, he had the

wiring completed and ask which generator I wanted to fire up.

"Let's add oil to the new one and give it a try."

"How much does it take?"

"About 12 quarts."

"Gottcha."

The new generator ran just like, well, a new generator. I'd have to shut it down after the break in period and change the oil. Meanwhile once the old one cooled off, I'd have to service it so I could switch back. When I mentioned that to Nelson, he said what with the damaged wing and all, he'd be glad to do it. I still hadn't taken any pain medication or antibiotics and I gratefully accepted.

"Carol invited us to dinner. She said she didn't figure we want to cook seeing how we were all shot up."

"Yes, Nelson installed the new generator, wired it in, filled the oil and got it running. He said that he'd come back and change the oil in the old generator and the new generator. Tomorrow, we're going back to that generator store and get them a generator too."

"A double setup?"

"That depends on what they decide they want, but there are two more of the Cummins DG series generators. There are at least a pair of 1,800rpm 30kw propane generators too. I only took one of four TPDT switches on the shelf. They can be setup just like us."

I finally took a Percocet and a broad spectrum oral antibiotic. I sat down to rest for a bit and awoke to find Kim shaking me.

"Hey, sleeping beauty, supper time. Nelson changed the oil in the old generator and said he'd change the oil in the new one tomorrow. Apparently for proper break-in, we run the genset at $\frac{1}{2}$ rated power for the first 2 hours and then at $\frac{3}{4}$ rated power for 2 more hours. I had to turn on some extra things."

"Is that right? I thought longer. Like 10 hours."

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"I hope canned ham, sweet potatoes and green beans are all right."

"Mrs. Tanner, I'm sure it will be just fine."

"Call me Carol, please. So are you two a couple now?"

"You don't beat around the bush much, do you? Yes, I suppose you can say we are a couple."

"Barry, I've been reading the manual on your generator. It says that if properly maintained, it can go 30,000-hours between overhauls."

"Really? I thought half of that, you know, about two years running 24/7."

"They have more diesel generators, you say?"

"Two."

"The same size?"

"Yes, slightly different models but same basic unit. They are more of the switches too. I don't know that you would need an ATS, but they're available."

"I know where there are two new truck stop diesel tanks, unless someone stole them."

"Really? The big ones?"

"Yeah, 40,000 or so. Ten feet in diameter about seventy feet long. They're doubled hulled fiberglass tanks. I think we'd have to bury them."

"All the better. It would be easy enough for someone to put a hole in my steel above-ground tank. Where are they?"

"At the truck stop west of town still sitting on the trailers."

"I have a semi tractor. We should go get one and get it installed for you. There must be 15,000 or more gallons of diesel in that tanker in my backyard. That would start you off with half a tank. Um, this is good Carol."

"Thank you."

"Well, it would take a couple of days to excavate the hole, place the tank and fill it back in. We should get the generators first, then the tanks. We can pull both of them here, then go to the city yard and get an excavator. We'll need fuel pumps for those tanks."

"I'll do what I can to help, but with this wound in my arm, it won't be much."

"Don't worry about that, Caleb is very strong. He's a mite slow but he more than makes up for it in other ways. Any chance we could haul both generators at once?"

"Considering the way I had to load it, we could only do it if I put one on the pickup and

the other on the trailer. We'd have to go back and get a forklift so we can unload the pickup."

"They have forklifts at the city yard."

"How are we going to unload the tanks?"

"They have a heavy truck mounted crane."

"Do you have everything else you need?"

"Just about. Anything I'm short of I can get at the plumbing supply or an electrical supply. About the only thing I'm short on is energy."

"This has been a very enjoyable dinner, and I thank you. As much as I hate to eat and run, it has been a very long day and between the pain pill and the hot food, I getting very sleepy."

"I'll be over first thing in the morning and change out the oil in the new generator. Know where we can get more oil?"

"Sure do, show you tomorrow."

"Thanks, Carol; both Barry and I appreciated it."

Kim – Chapter 6

"They're nice, aren't they?"

"Yes, and I think that Nelson is going to be a big help, especially since I'm going to have my arm in a sling for a few days."

"How bad is that wound, really?"

"Not as bad as it could be. It's a flesh wound and the antibiotics should help. If they don't and it becomes necrotic, we'll use maggot therapy."

"Maggots?"

"Yes. They only eat the dead tissue cleaning the wound thoroughly. It's old science that has returned to the vogue because of antibiotic resistant microorganisms."

"Let's hope we don't get to that."

"I agree. Kim, I'm going to take my antibiotic and a pain pill and turn in."

"My wound just burns and I got by with Tylenol. I understand; get some sleep, you have a full day ahead of you."

Whether it was the pain pill, the wound or a combination, I was slow getting up the next day. If anything, it hurt more today than it had yesterday. We covered the bandages with plastic wrap and I showered. Kim removed the old bandage, cleaned the wounds, applied Neosporin and new bandages. I noted that she had only put in a single stitch in each of the holes, allowing the wounds to drain. I stuck a couple of Percocet in a bag and took a Vicodin instead. I could always take a Percocet if the Vicodin wasn't enough pain relief, but I'd honestly rather not. I got around and went to see Nelson.

"Morning. How the arm?"

"It seems like it hurts worse today than it did yesterday, but I'm not going to keep taking Percocet. We need to switch the trailer hitch from pintle to ball and then we can go."

"I got the oil changed for you. That case of oil went fast."

"Yesterday we were at an oil change place and I found 6 full drums and 3 partial drums of Castrol. That's where the shooting incident occurred. We still can't get the oil because we can't haul 2 generators and 9 oil drums."

"We can go back. If I could get even a portable generator, I could use my refrigerator and freezer. We've kept the meat outside and it's been cold enough to keep it frozen."

"I picked up a very large portable from a rental place. You're free to use it until you get your system installed."

"How about we do that before we go?"

"Sure, come on over and I'll show you where it is."

"They should have put wheels on that, damn, it's heavy."

"Yeah, I about got a rupture putting in the pickup. You might want to send Caleb over to our house to pick up some of those yellow cans of diesel fuel."

"Would that I could. I'll take him with me and we'll each bring back two cans."

"I might as well go too, there are five cans and you may need all of them."

"Sure. Caleb, come here, I need your help."

"Yah, pa?"

"Come with me, we're going to carry back some cans of fuel."

"K, pa."

"They're right over there."

"Caleb, pick up two and put them in the garage."

"K."

"Now, get your rifle and get in the back of Mr. Simpson's pickup."

"I'm coming with you."

"I thought you were staying home, Kim."

"There's no way you can shoot a rifle and shooting your pistol left handed would be awkward, right?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm coming."

"Quite the lady, Barry. She right in there to protect you."

"If you only knew."

"What?"

"When I met her she was so anti-gun I was about ready to throw her out. I guess that's a good lesson in patience, I started her with a .22 rifle and worked to the .223. Later, I got her in tune with Browning, primarily because I installed a suppressor. She's gone from being a total liberal to a bit of a redneck."

"You know what they say."

"What do they say?"

"There are no atheists in foxholes."

"On that score, we're fortunate. She says she a Christian, even if she isn't devout."

"I take it from what was said yesterday that you two got together."

"We did. If we ever find a minister, I'll ask her to marry me and if she says yes, get the preacher to do the vows."

"We might not find a minister. All you two really need to do is exchange vows and then keep them. What did people do before there were ministers? Marriage predates history. Carol and I are Catholic. According to what we've been taught, the Church first defined marriage around the middle of the sixteenth century."

"Ready to go? Sorry, I was held up."

At least Kim didn't use the old standby that she had to powder her nose. I was feeling totally handicapped with my good arm out of commission. I had practiced a bit in the past with my left hand but wasn't ambidextrous. Any shooting I might have to do would be more in the nature of suppressive fire. If there had been one, there could be others. However, we hadn't been attacked near the generator dealer's place, but near the oil change place.

I directed Nelson to the place and suggested he pull around back. I gave him my pry bar and he opened the front door. I showed him the lineup of portable and gas generators and then we went to the back and opened the door for more light. The two diesels were still sitting where we'd left them, so far so good.

"As near as I can tell, one is rated 100 amps prime and the other around 115. You can see the weight on the box is the same so they can't be too different. I know for sure that they both have the same engine."

"I'll go and unhook the trailer so we can load the first in the pickup."

"Here Caleb, push this trailer back out of the way."

Kim was standing guard, her HK at low ready. She was constantly scanning, on the lookout for someone to get revenge on, or so I mused. Nelson made short work of loading the generator in the pickup and had Caleb pull the trailer forward so he could load the second. Then, he went back into the showroom and picked up a diesel fueled portable and the switches. They had fuel cans and Caleb and he cleaned them out. I thought I had all of the filters the dealer had, but Nelson found 2 more cases in the warehouse.

We closed up, turned tail and headed home. We parked the pickup at the Tanner's when we got home and got into the Hummer to go after the forklift at the city yard. When Nelson was on a roll, it appeared your best bet was to stay out of his way. Did I also mention he was a take charge sort of guy?

"I'll drive the forklift, Barry. You follow behind with the Hummer. We might run into somebody and I'll need you to provide cover."

We hadn't been shot at in our hometown, yet, so Kim had stayed to visit with Carol. I think Caleb stayed home because Nelson hadn't told him to come along. Forklifts don't travel very fast and we were a half hour getting back. Nelson got Caleb and they unloaded the second, then the first generator.

"I'll have Caleb bring over 5 of those new cans and we'll keep yours, if that's ok."

"Just leave five in the back of the pickup, I get them out later and fill them."

"Gottcha. Let me hook the trailer back up and you can drive your pickup back home."

"What can I do now? I'll do anything I can to help."

"With that busted wing and the way I do things, you probably be in the way. Why don't you go home and rest for a while? I see how much I can get done with these generators and we'll go after those large tanks tomorrow."

"If you insist..."

"I do. You've probably never been shot before. It's going to take longer than you think for the wound to fully heal."

I drove the pickup and trailer home and pulled them around back. I unloaded the diesel cans and set them by the tanker so I could fill them later. Then, I walked around front and backed the Hummer down the drive and positioned it along the curb in front of our home pointed towards the tract entry. It was perfectly positioned to lay down a pattern of fire covering the entry. I don't know why I felt it necessary, maybe I was being cautious.

Or maybe my sixth sense was at work trying to tell me something I couldn't understand.

One of the many definitions of the sixth sense was precognition which denotes a form of ESP where in a person is said to perceive information about places or events through paranormal means before they happen. Other people call it having the willies. And, for some unknown reason, the hair on the back of my neck was almost standing up. I saw Kim walking home and waited for her.

"What's with the Hummer?"

"I don't know, I've got the willies."

"What are you feeling uneasy about?"

"I don't know. Did you get the sense we were being watched at the generator store?"

"I sensed something, but I don't know what. You saw me out there with my rifle, yes, something made me feel uneasy."

"I had an interesting conversation with Nelson today."

"Do tell."

"The subject of our getting together was brought up, by Nelson. I said we did and that if we ever found a minister, I'd ask you to marry me. Nelson said something to the effect that all we really need to do is exchange vows and then keep them."

"We've had this discussion before, are you proposing?"

"What do you mean, before?"

"When you told me to clean your wound."

"Oh, the debriding. I don't know that I am, but it is worth a thought."

"I accept if you're asking."

"Are you sure? How long have we known each other? Less than two weeks, I think."

"Do you still want to throw me out?"

"Not on your life."

"I realized over the past few days that you were the mister right I was looking for. Maybe I couldn't find him because I was looking in the wrong places or maybe because he wasn't available. If you'll have me, I'll have you. If not, I'd be happy to be your live in girlfriend."

"Do you have any idea how much you've changed over a few days? You're not kidding yourself are you? This would only last until things got better?"

"They won't get better for a very long time. I think I had my head up my butt. That sum bit that shot me did us both a favor. One I'll remember every time I look at my arm."

"Do you promise to love me and keep me in sickness and health and hold yourself only unto me until death do us part."

"I do, do you?"

"I do. Is that enough or do we need more?"

"A ring would be nice."

"We'll go shopping and find one that fits."

"Two that fit, and matching."

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Despite my sense of unease, we went shopping and at the third store found matching rings in the right sizes. By now, the hair was standing straight out on the back of my neck. I showed Kim how to use the Ma Deuce and she manned the gun while I drove back to our home. Once there, I went straight to Nelson's.

"We did the marriage thing."

"Congratulations."

"Thanks but that's not why I'm here. I have a very uneasy feeling that started at the generator store and has been getting continuously worse."

"Now that you mention it, me too. I got the switches installed and everything wired in. All we have to do to finish is set the tank, put in the plumbing and start using it."

"What's Caleb doing on the front porch with his rifle?"

"He said something's wrong and got his gun. He couldn't explain it, but he has a sense for these things."

"That make four of us."

"You too Kim?"

"Yes, Nelson, me too."

"I'll go ask Carol, she claims to have ESP."

"Well?"

"She wearing her handgun and keeping her rifle close by."

"You've never had a chance to shoot those guns."

"She's shot an AR15 and the HK416 is set up the same. Same thing applies to my HK417, it's just the 416s bigger brother."

"I'm going to park the Hummer up against the curb in front of our place, pointed towards the tract entry."

"We ought to check the garages Barry. We might find enough cars to form a roadblock."

"Good idea, need help?"

"I'm done here for the day. I'll do it if you'll keep a watch while I'm getting it set up."

Kim and I moved the Hummer back to where I had it parked before. We retrieved four additional cans of .50 caliber ammo, dividing the load between our two good arms. These were set into the Hummer in such a way that we could quickly reload using them. That gave us a total of 10 100-round cans of .50 caliber ammo.

I also got my 590A1 and loaded it along with the 870 with the short barrel and magazine extension and longer spring installed. Although it wouldn't be easy, the wound wasn't in my shoulder and in a pinch I could probably use the long guns.

Towards sunset, we heard what sounded like a short firefight a ways off. I got my halogen lamp out of the garage and set it up in the middle of the street, running an extension cord for power. I tested it and then moved it up about 25', from where it could light almost the whole entry.

Nelson came up and said, "I sure wouldn't mind having a SAW or an M240."

"Take your pick."

"You have some?"

"One of each and more ammo than we could use in several firefights."

"I'll take the M240 and 6 cans of ammo."

"I get the gun, you get Caleb to help you move it and the ammo."

"What else do you have?"

"To quote my new wife, bombs and rockets."

"What?"

"A full assortment of grenades including smoke, offensive and defensive. Plus a large quantity of LAWs."

"Stock me up; this is just like my Army days."

While Kim manned the Ma Deuce, Caleb and I moved everything Nelson wanted to their house and put it in, you guessed it, the garage.

Getting the vehicles to block the entry may have been a good idea, but it wasn't without its problems. First, Nelson had to gain entry to the homes or break into the garage. Next, he had to get the garage doors up, without power. He only found keys for two of the vehicles, meaning the three others he found had to be moved the hard way. Caleb and he would roll them out of the garages and down to street level, turning them at the last moment to point toward the entry.

Then, he used his pickup to push them to the entry with Carol steering the disabled vehicle. They started at the curbs and put two on one side and one on the other. The two vehicles he found keys for were parked in the middle, closing off the entry. There was still one minor gap, he couldn't have gotten out of the last vehicle without leaving room to open the door, making it less than perfect.

"That's the best that I could do, Barry."

"Nelson, it looks fine. Anyone coming through that one small lane won't have much freedom of movement. We have another issue."

"What's that?"

"I have 5 sets of halogen lamps I thought we could set up between us and the cars to light the entry. I have a lot of those 100' extensions, enough for the lamps and more. We can light the entry or leave it unlighted until we hear something. However, someone is going to have to stand guard."

"Are you still feeling uneasy?"

"Aren't you?"

"Haven't had time to think about it. Yes, I guess I am. It all goes back to the generator place. Kim and Carol put together a supper. We're eating at your house tonight. We'll let

Caleb eat first and he can keep an eye out while we're eating."

"What did they make?"

"Nothing I've ever eaten, pepper steak over rice."

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"It was my father's recipe. You start out by slicing a round steak into thin strips and brown them with just a little onion. To that, you add soy sauce and frozen pepper strips. When they're done, you add brown gravy mix to make the liquid into a sauce. Before you start the steak, you get some rice cooking and they are usually ready about the same time."

"Smells good."

"Tastes better," Nelson said.

"It's good, but it needs something."

"Try adding more soy sauce."

"Ah, that's better. Not that it wasn't good to begin with, but that's better."

"My mother didn't like so much soy sauce so Daddy made it with less, then added more when he ate."

"Carol, let me explain. Barry, Caleb and I will be standing guard tonight. We're going to set up Barry's halogen lights down the street a little ways and either light the entry or turn on the lights if there's trouble. Barry, I don't suppose you have a power strip with five outlets do you?"

"Sure do."

"How about we run a power line to the Hummer and plug the power strip into that? We can run extension cords from the Hummer to those five lamps. We can leave them off, but turn them on at the first sign of trouble."

"I'm taking a turn too," Kim announced.

Kim – Chapter 7

Once she made her mind up to something, I was quickly learning, your best bet was to just go along with her program. The ladies cleared away the dishes, loaded the dish washer and cleaned the stove. They didn't have to worry about storing any leftovers, the rice and pepper steak pans were empty. As I said before, she could cook, too. There wouldn't be much of a honeymoon with us both winged and a looming threat. We may have gotten the cart ahead of the horse, but when we said the vows, there weren't any unanswered questions. In more normal times, that may not have been the case.

Nelson put together a schedule that started with Caleb since he was already keeping an eye out. I'd noticed that Nelson had a particular way of working with Caleb that worked rather well. For instance, he didn't tell him to stand guard duty, he told him to keep an eye out. Caleb wouldn't miss any activity that occurred when he was doing that. With four people, the shifts were three hours long, 6-9, 9-12, 12-3 and 3-6. Nelson took the second shift and left it to Kim and me to decide the graveyard shift. If it hadn't been for the wounds, we could have had a bit of our honeymoon. Kim was quick to find a way around that.

With what little sleep we ended up getting, tomorrow was going to be a very long day. I took the midnight to three shift, letting her get a little sleep. There had been no activity on the two previous shifts, and operating strictly by sound, I didn't think anything had happened on my shift. We'd have to find time to go to the Nation Guard post and get some night vision equipment, something that neither I nor Nelson had, or realized we had. MUNS is the acronym for Magnum Universal Night Sight.

Kim started breakfast when she came off shift. She woke me and I ate before wrapping my arm, getting the shower and so forth. Rather than trying to shave left handed, I skipped the shave. After, she changed the dressing on my arm, again. It was oozing slightly but didn't appear to be inflamed, always a good sign. I had concluded that the wound must have been caused by a FMJ bullet, the exit wasn't much larger than the entrance.

While I had some soft pointed hunting ammo, and a small amount of hollow point match ammo, most of the ammo we had was standard military ball ammo. I'd probably use the match ammo in my M1A, when appropriate. That was the ammo that I'd used to sight the rifle and scope in. I wasn't a match shooter, 700-yards or so was the best I could do and maintain a decent pattern and then, only with the scope.

Today, I switched to the AR15 because in a pinch I could probably handle the light rifle. I also didn't wear the sling and later regretted that. However, before 10am both those large diesel tanks were parked on our street.

"I grabbed what plumbing I saw at the truck stop for those tanks. Pumps, too. We might be able to get them in and plumbed without a lot of difficulty. Let's go after the excavator and I'll try to get that hole dug."

"If we can spare the time, Nelson, I'd like to run out to the Guard post and look for some night vision."

"We'll make the time. We'll do that first and get the excavator on the way home. Shifts work out ok last night?"

"I'm sure you got more sleep than I did."

"That's why I set it up that way, with you guys being on your honeymoon and all. Is your arm better?"

"Not really, I regretted not using the sling."

"Well, get it. Caleb will go with us and ride back with you in the pickup."

"Fine. Did you notice, those tanks were made in California by Bakersfield Tank and Engineering? They're double hulled."

"Barry, there isn't any EPA to give us a hard time about installing those tanks."

"No, I was just thinking it was a long way to haul the tanks."

"Caleb, boy, get your gun."

We pulled through the opening in the entry and Kim moved the vehicles back in place for us. Our previously quiet neighborhood was turning into something unimaginable. However, with the large underground diesel tanks, I could leave the diesel tanker at the tank farm, unloaded. I was fairly certain that I didn't want a really large propane tank, if you punch a hole in one and get a spark, you can wipe out half a city block.

Having noted where most things were, it took us less than an hour to get some of the latest night vision the Guard unit had. We proceeded to the city yard and got the excavator. Caleb and I followed Nelson home. He also mentioned that his good friends called him Nels. So be it.

Nels worked all day on his hole and when I went over to look after he quit for the day, he was about half done. Another day and we could set the tank and the day after, plumb it. Ours should go faster because the equipment and the tank was already here. I was struck by our good fortune, so far. We had ample food and ammo, some heavier weapons, huge storage tanks and I had picked up a companion. Before that awful day, we hadn't been nearly that well off, mainly due to money.

It appeared that for now we'd be eating community meals. It required half the cooking and utensils and both Kim and Carol found ways to keep our diet interesting. I didn't know just how deeply the ground was frozen but saw a lot of 3' chunks of earth in Nels

backyard. No doubt those would be set aside or moved somewhere so we could level our yards in preparation of planting gardens come spring. I should back up and point out that the tank dimensions were 70' long by 10' in diameter. While the hole itself didn't have to be very large, there was the overburden that increased the size of the hole.

After another uneventful night, Nels started early and had his hole dug by mid afternoon. We made a trip to the city yard to get the truck mounted crane and were able to get the tank set in place. Nels took one of the halogen lamps and worked for several hours after his shift ended putting in the plumbing.

The following morning, he back filled and came after the tanker, dumping the entire load into his tank. With that, he had his generators up and running. He came by later and wanted to make a trip to the tank farm to refill the tanker. I told him to get a generator to power the pumps and we'd do it. That took some time and he was able to top off his tank with a little left over. He added that to my tank and refilled my 5-gallon cans that I had set aside.

"I need to rest. I'll start on your hole tomorrow."

"That's fine Nels, no rush."

"I don't know about you, but that uneasy feeling has never left me. We're going to need a dump truck and loader to haul the extra dirt somewhere. I'm half tempted to pile it in front of the cars we can't move."

"Go for it. I just wished the block wall surrounding the tract were made of solid concrete and higher."

"I don't have any skills in laying block, sorry."

"Yeah, neither do I."

"The good part of that is that we're surrounded by forest on three sides and only have to worry about the entry. If there is enough dirt, I'll put some in front of the wall, too."

"It's a shame we don't have a moat."

"Now there's an idea. We have the excavator. I could dig a deep wide trench a ways in front of the fence and pile the extra soil against the wall."

"If time permits, I'd go for that. It would be nice to find a running car to put behind the lane to block it off."

"There are all kinds of cars sitting around, we'll borrow one. That's all we really need, one to block the lane."

Right, something like a pickup with a camper that we could back up against the lane and block it. The downside was people could slip into the lane and climb the camper. I guess that's why people make lists of pro's and con's. Let's face it, even with three machineguns, rockets and grenades, two families didn't constitute much of a security force. To have any kind of decent security, we need to get out and find more families to populate our little housing tract. The limit would probably be fourteen families because that was how many empty houses there were. We had finally gone door to door and all of the homes had been empty. Caleb didn't go to school; Carol was a stay at home mom and Nels made it home in record time the day of the event.

Nels started early the next day, in the dark around 5am. I heard him and although I was beat, got up, rigged a wrap for my arm and showered. My face was beginning to itch, but I didn't have an electric razor. I used the fine edging clippers to peel off one layer of beard. I was out of the shower and dressed, except for my shirt by the time Kim came in."

"Oh, you're up."

"Yes, and I showered and shaved as much as I could. The coffee is made and I was just sitting here waiting for you to change the bandage before I finished dressing."

"Let's look. Well, the oozing is down a little and it looks like there's no infection. They have to heal from the inside out, right?"

"I think so yes."

"I'm going to leave the stitches in until the wounds close, unless you develop a reaction to the stitches. I know that some people seem to be allergic to stitches of any kind."

"If I recall correctly, the wound should close in anywhere from 10 to 14 days. As far as I know, I don't have a suture allergy, but I've only been stitched once before and it was staples in my head."

"They did it to keep your brains from leaking out?"

"I guess."

"I'll have a bowl of cereal and then am going to take a nap. There's nothing on the agenda today, is there?"

"Not that I know of. Good luck on sleeping, that excavator is loud."

I finished dressing and went out back to see how Nels was doing. It appeared that he was digging at a faster rate on our hole than he had on his, he was nearly one-third of the way towards completion. There wasn't much for me to do, Caleb was in the Hummer, keeping an eye out, Nels was digging, Kim was sleeping and I was tired. I went in

and sat down in my recliner. The next thing I knew, Kim was shaking me awake.

"Supper time."

"Did I sleep all day?"

"When did you sit down?"

"Not long after you went to bed."

"Then, I guess you slept all day. Nels says the hole will be done tomorrow morning and by the end of the day the tank will be installed, covered over and might even contain a load of fuel."

"He's a mad man. You watch, after his shift, he'll come back and finish the hole."

"I don't think so, he said he was exhausted. I worked it so he can sleep and we'll pull 4 hours shifts tonight."

"We discussed the possibility of his digging a moat in front of the entry fence to the tract."

"I thought those went out with the Middle Ages."

"No, we had them during the Civil War."

"Filled with water?"

"We didn't discuss that, we only talked about a large ditch."

"Well, either way, it would slow people down."

"My thoughts exactly. So, are we eating here or at the Tanner's?"

"We're eating here and it's just the two of us."

"You have ideas?"

"Don't you?"

"I am fairly well rested."

"I can fix that."

She did too. Unfortunately, with 4 hour shifts, I had the 10-2 shift and we had to stop fooling around. She had been true to her word, I was exhausted. I hoped we wouldn't

have any visitors tonight, Nels was sleeping in, Kim was napping and I was happy tired. I guess I hadn't reckoned on how much energy a 23-year-old woman has. Had you asked me the day or shortly after I found her, I'd have said this would never happen. Goes to show you how wrong people can be.

Kim came out around 2am and laid a heavy kiss on me. She said, "I love you Barry Simpson," I responded almost automatically, "I love you too, Kim Simpson."

"It's still Wilson without a formal ceremony."

"Sorry."

"No problem. Get some sleep and I'll wake you for breakfast."

Even if we found a minister and had a proper ceremony, the way things went in this day and age, she might keep her maiden name. We had, after all, politically corrected ourselves into WW III. Afraid to offend our natural enemies, we'd let them get the jump on us and ended up being on the receiving end of a first strike. I have no doubt we retaliated, but that didn't do the citizens of the US much good. As far as I knew, we hadn't been invaded.

And, by golly, there had to be any number of families in this town. Enough to fill several housing tracts. The radiation hadn't been that high, not really. None of our infrastructure was damaged save the inability to supply electricity and gas, the latter tied to the first. Our electricity came from a far off coal fueled plant. Even if we found it and got it running, it would soon run out of coal.

"Wake up sleepy head. Breakfast is ready."

"I'll get my robe and be right out."

"I made scrambled eggs and toast."

"Sounds fine to me. What was that bit this morning about it still being Wilson? Are we or are we not a married couple?"

"We are in our eyes, but not in the eyes of the law."

"Have you never heard of common law marriage? Common-law marriage can still be contracted in 11 states and the District of Columbia, can no longer be contracted in 26 states, and was never permitted in 13 states. The requirements for a common-law marriage to be validly contracted differ from state to state. Nevertheless, all states – including those that have abolished the contract of common-law marriage within their boundaries – recognize common-law marriages lawfully contracted in those jurisdictions that still permit it. Working in a law office, you should know that this is a common law marriage state."

"The subject was never brought up."

"So, is it still Wilson or is it Simpson?"

"In that case, Simpson."

"I love you Kim Simpson."

"I love you too Barry Simpson."

Nels was working at as fast a pace as was possible. Just before 10am, he came and got me so we could set the tank in place. It didn't take long and he partially backfilled the hole. Next, he proceeded to connect the fuel lines and had to shut down the generator to install a T connection and additional shut off valves, each generator had one too. That done, he continued backfilling while I emptied what little fuel remained in the tanker into the huge tank. We had a quick lunch and set out to the tank farm for our first load of fuel. Before the day ended, my tank was full too and we had a full tanker parked down the block. That man could work, let me tell you.

"I have both of my generators broke in now, so we should have continuous power. I did some extra wiring and it's set up so if one generator shuts down, the other starts."

"We ought to do that to our setup too."

"Already did. Why a pickup with a camper? Someone could sneak up in that little lane and climb on top of the camper and have a good shooting position."

"Yes, that's the con to the setup. Anything we do will have pro's and con's. By the way, Kim and I had a discussion this morning. This state is a common law marriage state and I asked her flat out if we were married. After some discussion, she agreed that we were and will go by Simpson from now on."

"I'll mention it to Carol. Of course, I already figured you had a common law marriage."

"One of the four conditions is that you claim to have a common law marriage."

"I didn't know that. I'll tuck that away for future use. I guess I'll start on the moat tomorrow."

"Wouldn't you rather go looking for more people?"

"We could. However, if we have the moat in place, the tract will appear more secure and that might be the deciding factor as to whether they move here or not."

"How long do you figure the moat will take?"

"Four days. Plus another to haul the extra dirt from our backyards and stack it. Now I know it's only the first part of February, but I'd like to have the yards cleaned up before that ground thaws."

"I'll move the Hummer out on the road to provide you cover while you dig."

"Good, I'd appreciate that. Let's eat; the ladies have been cooking all day."

The smell of fresh baked bread assailed my nose when we entered the Tanner home.

"Um, something smells good."

"Carol showed me how to bake bread. From now on, we're going to take turns, provided you have the bread pans."

"There are six of them in the cupboard."

"I hope hamburger gravy on toast is ok."

"We ate it all the time in the Army, but we called it SOS."

"So Nels told me. Sorry I don't have any fresh eggs, you'll have to settle for scrambled."

"They'll be just fine."

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For the next five days, while I watched, Nels dug the ditch. Between the dirt he'd pile up against the wall and the depth of the ditch, it would take a mountain climber to get up the loosely piled dirt. On the last day, he moved the dirt, making sure to not compact it. That evening over dinner, he posed an interesting question."

"Barry, what would you think about us adding mines?"

"Which mines did you have in mind?"

"Oh, the M14, M16 and the M18s."

"The problem I see with land mines is the problem people have always had with mines. Even if you map the locations, the map could get lost, later generations might not know where they were or how to disarm them and even we might have trouble disarming them later if we wanted. Do you think Caleb would understand land mines?"

"Probably not. It was just a thought."

"I didn't say we shouldn't get any mines, just that land mines might not be the best idea. I wouldn't have any problems if we could find some Claymores."

"That's the most dangerous mine of all."

"True. The thing is, you don't bury them. Plus we can set some up with trip wires and use the remainder as command detonated."

"If we can find some."

"Right, if we can find some."

That was a project for another day; I really wanted to look for people. However, in his straight forward vision, the next day brought us to the Guard post.

"You are single minded."

"Plenty of time to look for people, Barry. Self-defense is the order of the day."

"You familiar with the Claymore?"

"Yep, you?"

"Yes, I had the training. I think we'll only want enough set up with a trip wire to give us warning."

"Maybe, but we haven't found them yet."

"They're in the fourth bunker down. Saw them when I was getting ammo."

"Why didn't you take them?"

"That was early on and Kim and I hadn't really started to get along. Call it her liberal period."

"Be that as it may. I can tell you one thing; she's head over heels in love with you."

"How do you know?"

"Something she said to Carol. More than that, I do not know, so save your questions. By golly, would you look at that, the whole bunker is full of mines."

"Some may be M14s. I think the only M16s are in Korea."

"We can load them all and not plant any M14s we find. I can't say as I agree with you on that, but if we have them, it means that someone else won't have them."

"Ok, I'll go along with that. Do you have room in your garage to store them?"

"The M14s?"

"Yes, I wouldn't mind the M18s."

"You will store explosives, but only certain explosives?"

"Something like that."

"Did you get all of the rockets?"

"No, I only took a few."

"If we have room, let's get more. We can take them out of their storage cases and they won't take much room."

"I know."

Despite what Nels said, there weren't that many mines. The Claymore came packed in a bandoleer containing one mine and various firing components. It was possible using det cord to explode the mine to string a continuous row of trip wires, leaving no gaps. Figuring a 15' trip wire, we'd need about 10 mines set up that way. We could set up some of the additional mines in an overlapping coverage and could aim some directly at Elm Place. The key thing was to keep Caleb away from the trip wires.

On the way home, we stopped at the entry and Nels unloaded 10 Claymores. I took the remainder of the load first to our garage, where I unloaded half the M72s and all of the Claymores. The remaining mines, the M14s, and the remaining M72s went in Nels garage. I noticed that his garage was nearly as full as ours, but he had more food than we had and less ammo. His largest item, by quantity, was unopened shelf-stable, canned hams which could be stored at room temperature for 2 years.

I realized that once we emptied our freezers, we'd be out of beef unless we found a live beef and managed to butcher and cut it up. If nothing else, we could take a portable generator to a grocery store to power their equipment to cut up the meat. They'd have a grinder and that would allow us to produce ground beef. We could always check the library and see if they had any books on meat cutting.

Kim – Chapter 8

"We're eating at the Tanner's tonight."

"Let me guess, Carol is fixing ham."

"No, she's fixing a turkey roast from their freezer. Why would you say ham?"

"They have half a garage stall stacked with that shelf stable ham."

"We don't have that much, but we have a lot."

"Yes, but our cans are the small Dak hams. The ones they have are larger, 4 or 5 pounds."

"Did you get what you wanted at the Guard post?"

"I caved in and we brought back some M14 mines, but they are stored at the Tanners. We have more rockets; we took what they had and divided them. I wanted to go look for people but Nels insisted on going to the post."

"You can look for people tomorrow. Not long ago, I would have cringed at the thought of guns, ammo, grenades, rockets and mines. Now, I know I was wrong. You know, it has to be the education system we had and all that stuff that we had to be politically correct."

"Couldn't have said better myself. As a matter of fact, I probably did. I keep a diary and try to record the events of the day."

"Can I read it?"

"No, right now, it might make you mad."

"Why?"

"I wrote what I thought at the time. My opinion has changed over time, but in the beginning, it wasn't very complimentary concerning you."

"Stinker."

"Yes, you were."

"That's not what I meant."

"No, but it fit at the time."

"We have several hours to kill, any ideas?"

"Well..."

If anyone came knocking at the door for the next few hours, we didn't hear them. I assumed that it would take Nels anywhere from 2½ to 4 hours to place the Claymore mines and set up the tripwires connected to the detonators. The design of a Claymore allows it to be set up for both command detonation and tripwire detonation simultaneously. If he did that, it would take all day. We showered and changed before we joined them for dinner.

"How did you make out?"

"I have the tripwire mines set up. I need two more to cover the road. When you didn't answer your door, I figured you were sleeping and went back and set the mines up to be command detonated as well. The two mines I intend to set up to cover the road will be command detonated only. I see you put the M14s in my garage."

"We took a nap after I gave you half the rockets and all of the M14s. My concern remains Caleb."

"We'll take care of that. Caleb will do as he's told and not leave the tract. As a matter of fact, the only time he's ever been out of the tract was when he was with one of us."

"Carol, my compliments, this is very good."

"Thank you. The potatoes are instant and I had to add a couple of jars of turkey gravy to go around. It's stovetop dressing, but I think it came out rather well."

"It's a feast," Kim added.

"It occurred to me that we are emptying out our freezers. One day in the not too distant future, we'll be out of beef and probably pork. Might be nice to go looking for some animals we can butcher. I figured we could go to the library and get a book on butchering."

"No need for that, Barry. All I need is a meat saw, grinder and power. Don't much know what to do with the hides, but you kill 'em, skin 'em', cut them into halves or quarters and let them age a few days to develop a little flavor and tenderize. Then, you saw 'em and wrap 'em or grind up the leftovers."

"You cut meat?"

"For a while, a long time ago."

"What about hogs?"

"They're cut up different, but we should be able to figure it out, I know the primary cuts."

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With most of the work done, Nels was back to taking a guard shift so Kim and I got some sleep before we had our turn. The uneasiness had lessened; however, it was still there. With only two more mines to place, there was no way I could see Nels getting out of going looking for people tomorrow. It was winter, there would be smoke or steam from chimneys unless people had generators and electric heaters, which led to them needing fuel.

Many of the homes in our town were older homes that had been built back in the day of using wood or coal to heat. As a consequence many had a coal room in the basement. Most people had converted to propane or natural gas, depending on their location. I supposed some still burned stoker coal and used convection distribution of the heat. There was a tendency for some people to be old fashioned, even though ours was a thoroughly modern community.

I pulled my 12-3 shift and crawled back in bed to get the extra sleep I needed for the wound to heal and because I was tired. I was awakened by a large explosion and climbed into my clothes and grabbed my web gear and rifle. Kim was in the Hummer, obviously on high alert.

"What was it?"

"I think one of those mines went off."

"What happened?" Nels asked as Caleb and he joined us.

"Kim said a mine may have gone off."

"We'd better go check. You pull the truck ahead and I'll sneak a peek."

Two or three minutes later, we had our answer and it wasn't what we expected. A large dog had been nosing around and tripped a trip wire. Got himself blown to hell and gone. We backed up the pickup closing the lane and Kim went to put on a pot of coffee. It was a little past 5am, time to get up anyway.

"You know, I thought about that when I was setting the trip wires. I wondered if we'd have to put in a fence to keep animals away. Didn't take long to get an answer, we're going to have to put in a fence. Won't take much, a couple dozen posts, a couple of gates, a roll or so of pig wire. Maybe a day, day and a half to raise it."

"I was hoping to go look for people."

"In many ways, it's a one man job. You wouldn't be much use driving steel posts or

stretching wire. You could dig the eight post holes for the fence ends, corners and to support the gates. Should be able to get everything we need at the lumberyard or a farm store."

"Do you know what we need?"

"Sure."

"Why don't you take Caleb and go find it? Kim and I will go looking for people. We'll come back, say around noon for lunch, and I can dig your post holes then. Or, if you know how to use the digger, feel free to use it yourself. I assume you'll replace the mine and put in the two covering the road?"

"Actually, I'll probably disable all of them while Caleb is outside the tract helping me. He wouldn't go out on his own, but if I told him to go, that could be a different story."

"We need anything from any of the stores?"

"Can't think of anything. Shame we don't have a precious metals dealer."

"And, if we did?"

"Corner the market on gold and silver coins."

Apparently Nels didn't know that one of the local jewelers dealt in precious metals. He didn't have a volume business by any means, but in recent years as people became more unsettled with the state of the economy, he stocked and sold some. I checked it out, but we couldn't afford it, not with the price of gold and silver being what it was. He dealt exclusively in US gold and silver coins, the Eagles series, plus pre-65 silver coins. It wouldn't hurt to check it out. Nels left, his work for the day clearly in his mind. We went in and ate breakfast. We showered, changed my dressing and dressed.

"You know Kim, Nels was wrong about our not having a precious metals dealer."

"I didn't know we had one."

"One of the jewelry stores dealt in US gold and silver coins and pre-65 90% silver coins. I checked it out once, but didn't buy any because the price was too high."

"What are we waiting for?"

"He had a very large safe that may be hard to get into."

"I have an idea about that. Let's find the safe first."

It was a short journey to the jewelry store. It wasn't locked but there was no merchan-

dise out. I cautiously pulled my .45, someone could be here. We entered and called out, but got no response. The store owner was seated at his desk and when I checked, he was dead. There wasn't a mark on his body, but he had been fumbling with a small pill bottle. I figured heart attack and he was trying to get to his nitro. Meanwhile, Kim was in the backroom looking at the safe.

"Most safes are 3 or 4 tumbler. The one the law office had was three tumbler, left-right-left-right. The first turn is to clear the lock. Most safes begin with left and end with right on three tumbler or left with four tumbler. I suppose the reverse could be true, starting on right and ending on right. Numerous businesses keep their safes on what locksmiths call day lock. By dialing all the numbers of the combination, business users unlock the company safe. Then when closing it, they do not cancel out the combination. This means someone can open the safe by simply opening the door or, at the most, just entering the last number of the combination. If a safecracker is lucky enough to come across a safe that has been day-locked, then at the very worst he need only guess at the last number."

"Did you try the handle?"

"No luck. It looks like he came in to open up. Perhaps he dialed in all but the last number, leaving the safe in day lock. It's worth a shot, unless you can find the combination written down somewhere."

"Why would he do that?"

"He's an old geezer with a bad heart. Maybe his mind was going too and he couldn't remember the combination."

"Let's try your way first. If he did write it down, it might take all day to find it."

"I'm going with r-l-r-l-r. I'll turn the dial one number at a time and check the handle."

I was about ready to go looking for the combination when she said, "Tah-tah. Would you like a Rolex or a Bulova?"

"You did it?"

"Look, but it's mostly jewelry."

"What's in that lock box?"

"I don't know, but it's heavy."

"That should be his gold and silver coins."

"What about that money bag?"

"It could be his pre-65 silver. It was usually sold in bags containing \$1,000 face value. Silver was pushing \$30, so if it's a full bag, it would be worth about \$27,000. Let me see the lock box."

"You pick it up."

"It's locked. Go see if he has a key ring."

"Why don't you go?"

"You're the locksmith."

"Got it."

"Let's look inside."

"Wow!!! How much do you think is in there?"

"I don't know, a lot. A gold bar weighs 400 troy ounces or about 12.4 kilos or 27.4 regular pounds. A gold Eagle can be $\frac{1}{10}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ or 1 troy ounce of pure gold. They weigh a bit more than the stated weight because they're made from 22 carat gold. The silver Eagle only comes in the one ounce size."

"Guess."

"Maybe as much as one gold bar, maybe a little more."

"And the price of gold was?"

"Right around \$1,650 an ounce."

"So that little box could be worth..."

"\$660,000."

"Holy Mary, mother of God."

"I think it's closer to 30 pounds, but there are some silver Eagles in there. We'll divide it 50-50 with the Tanner family."

"Why, we found it?"

"It was his idea, that's only being fair."

"In that case, I'm getting us a pair of Rolex watches."

"Sure, whatever."

Kim picked out a pair of gold Rolex watches that were probably worth their weight in gold, if not more. We put the lockbox and coin bag in the Hummer after she reset the lock on the safe into the day lock position. Now we had time to look for people. We climbed to the roof of the same building and started looking for smoke, noting the locations where we found some. There was one area, a neighborhood, I'd say, that we'd avoid for now. I thought we'd be better off approaching single families because we might be able to persuade them that there was security in numbers.

We discussed it and decided that we'd both dismount and I'd have my rifle slung while she kept hers at the low ready. I'd go knock on the door, then step back so they could get a full view of me. When we arrived at the first house, we set our plan into motion. She stood in front of the Hummer, rifle at low ready and I knocked then stepped back. Nothing, no response. I tried a second time with the same results.

"Kim, let's trade places, they might be more likely to respond to a female."

"Can your arm take it?"

"I'll be ok."

I was sort of ok, although the wound was nearly healed, the hurting part hadn't stopped when I put weight on my arm. Still... I was down to large Band-Aids and Neosporin. Kim knocked and stepped back. A moment later the door opened and it was a man. I couldn't quite hear the conversation, but it seemed to be going well. After a minute or two, she motioned me forward.

"Barry, meet Robert Daniels. I've explained as best I could what our proposition is. An empty furnished home, food, power after we install a generator and so forth. Mr. Daniels is married and they have three children."

"Pleased to meet you, Robert."

"As I understand it Barry, you live in a small housing tract of rather nice homes with abundant security. You have a well, a means of protection, fuel and so forth."

"That's generally accurate, Robert. I have the only well, a backup in case we lost city water. The water and sewer still work, but the gas and electricity are off. It's a small development that started out to be bigger, but hard times came and they stopped building. We're surrounded on three sides by woods and the tract is fenced in with a block wall. You would be welcome to come see for yourself before you decide. Let me just say that anyone who moves into the tract would be expected to pull their own weight."

"Hang on a minute; I need to talk to Judy."

He was back in two minutes.

"Ok. I'll come look. No promises."

"Fair enough."

"I'll drive my own vehicle."

"Ok, just follow us back to the tract."

Was it wise, inviting a perfect stranger into the tract? I don't really know. We couldn't get people if we weren't willing to take a few risks, like showing them what was available. So far, Nels had water, but only because the huge city water tank that served our part of town had been full and few, if any, people were using water from that tank. We probably have to find an industrial sized generator to power the pumps and refill the tank once it emptied. I had switched to the well immediately out of concern for contamination to the water supply. It probably wouldn't have mattered, Nels wasn't losing any hair.

Robert had what I considered the ultimate SUV, the H2. Low gas mileage, but hey, just a smaller H1. Should have had a diesel engine. When we arrived back, there was a pile of fencing materials, both the wood and steel posts were in and Nels and Caleb were stringing the first row of pig wire. I stopped so I could introduce Nels and Robert and show Robert some of our preparations. He didn't need to know about the Claymores until they moved in.

"Robert Daniels, Nelson Tanner; Nels, Robert Daniels."

"Robert, made their pitch, did they?"

"Yes and my wife and I decided I should come take a look. If I like what see, I'll go get her and the children and we'll all look around. What's the fence for?"

"So dogs don't set of the mines."

"Land mines?"

"No, Claymore mines. Put 'em in yesterday. Had a big dog come by around 5am and hit a trip wire. Kaboom, one dead dog. We have a deep wide ditch, or moat if you prefer. Dirt's loosely stacked up against the fence. It would take a Billy goat to get up it."

"And the fence?"

"To keep out stray animals and children. That why the extra set of gates, open both sets and you've block the trip wire field."

"Long gates."

"Eighteen footers. They'll overlap some when they're open. The beauty of it is that we can get rid of those cars."

"They don't run?"

"Two do. The rest are just parked, couldn't find keys."

"I suppose that I'd better get to looking."

"Nice to meet you Robert."

"Nelson."

When he'd gotten out, Robert wasn't wearing a gun although he may have had a rifle in the H2. That H2 was pretty much a near-do-well vehicle. Semi pricey, 40-50 grand. I wasn't going to educate any more liberals, one had been enough. We went through the tract, my pointing out our home and the Tanner's home. I told him all the remaining homes were empty. Generators could be had and we were considering wind and/or solar. I didn't mention our double generator setups or our truck stop sized diesel tanks. I think the song said, 'You have to know when to hold 'em, and know when to fold 'em'.

"I noticed you weren't carrying a firearm, Robert."

"Don't much take to them. Never really had time to hunt, what with work and all."

"Did you serve in the military?"

"No, I went to college and got an education. Went to work right out of school."

"Have you ever fired a firearm?"

"Not in a very long time, no."

"Do you have any objections to firearms?"

"Not in the hands of police and the military."

"In case you haven't noticed, there don't seem to be any police and the military haven't been around."

"Well, there are always some folks, like you, who have firearms, same difference, I suppose."

"Did you know that the police are under no obligation to protect you?"

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"I don't think I'd want to have any firearms."

"I'll have to tell you, Robert, you wouldn't fit in here. We have four adults and one child. Four of those five, including the child, pull guard duty."

"That boy I saw? He almost a man."

"True, but he is borderline retarded."

"Then, why is he on guard duty?"

"He's a damned good shot."

"And you would expect me to pull guard duty?"

"You and any of your children who are old enough."

"Maybe you're right, we might not fit in."

"You wouldn't fit in or your entire family wouldn't fit in?"

"Is there a difference?"

"How far would you go to protect your kids?"

"Well, I..."

"How far would their mother go to protect them?"

"All the way."

"See what I mean?"

"Where would I find a gun and get lessons on using it?"

"Right here, right now."

Kim – Chapter 9

"Uh, you have me trapped. Ok, I'll learn to use a gun. I should be willing to go as far as Judy would."

"Kim, go warn Nels were going to be doing some firing for a while."

"Ok."

"Kim had the same attitude you do, only worse. I started her on a .22, moved up to the AR15, and eventually to the 9mm handgun with a silencer."

"Might as well start with the AR, I've shot a .22, a very long time ago."

"Still remember the safety rules?"

"I think so. Finger off the trigger until you intend to shoot. Don't point a firearm at anything you don't intend to shoot. Squeeze, don't jerk, the trigger."

"Close enough. Ok, let me get the AR and 3 or 4 magazines."

I got the rifle, magazines and two targets. I taped the two targets on part of the wall we hadn't shot up and returned to Robert.

"This rifle is sighted to shoot to point of aim and I've adjusted it to the sighting range, 25 meters. This line on the ground is exactly 25 meters from the wall. This is a standard government issue 30-round magazine for the M16, the military version of the AR15. By point of aim, I mean that the bullet will hit right at the top of the front sight provided it is centered in the rear sight. Let me show you how to load it. First, you insert the magazine. It is not a clip. Next, you pull back on the bolt and release it sharply. If it doesn't move fully forward, this is the assist. Now, you try shooting it."

"Offhand?"

"Well, you do know something about shooting. Go ahead and try offhand. It's the least stable and if you hit well, it means you may be a very good shot with practice."

Robert took his time, watched his breathing, squeezed the trigger and worked his way through the first magazine. I was watching with my binoculars and he was doing fairly well, someone had taught him how to shoot. In my experience, if a person has been taught to shoot properly, it's much like riding a bicycle. All they really need to do is remember their training and adapt it to that firearm.

"Want to go look?"

"How did I do?"

"Above average. You must have had a good trainer."

"I did, a professional."

"Professional training and you don't like firearms? Can you explain?"

"There was a shooting in a school I attended. I dropped out of shooting classes after that; had a friend get killed. Guess I blamed the gun instead of the shooter."

"It happens. Let me show you how to clean the rifle and you can take it and some ammo home with you. Want a handgun?"

"You'll teach me?"

"As long as you're willing to learn. You know, on second thought, you might fit in here well. Your wife has the right attitude and you seem to be having a change of heart."

"I don't know if I could shoot anyone."

"No one knows for certain until the situation presents itself. When you're the only one between the bad guy and your family, I think you'll shoot."

"I'll pass on the handgun, unless you have a revolver. If you do, make it a .357."

"SP101 ok? Would you rather have a GP100?"

"I have fairly large hands."

"Ok, one GP100 with a pair of speed loaders. Shotgun?"

"What do you have?"

"Mossberg 590, don't have any of the A1s left," I lied.

"12 gauge?"

"Yes, eight plus one."

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"How much for all this stuff?"

"Nothing, it's paid for."

"I can't do that. I mean these guns must have cost a small fortune."

"I'm sure they did. They're salvage. My wife paid for them with her life."

"I thought Kim was your wife."

"Second wife. My first wife died in a gun store helping the owner protect his class III inventory."

"In that case, I'd feel guilty if I turned them down."

"But wait, there's more!!!"

"More what?"

"Want some bombs and rockets?"

"Huh?"

"Hand grenades and LAWs rockets."

"Maybe after I move in, not before, thank you."

A wise decision. Since he hadn't been in the military, I figured the only way he'd know about a LAW rocket was from the Dirty Harry movie. It would be a better idea to have some hand grenade training using the one practice grenade we'd found or a smoke grenade. They didn't have that many at the Guard post to begin with. I showed Robert the ins and outs of each firearm he was taking and how to clean the AR. I intended to replace that with a better firearm once they moved in. I gave him an Outers universal gun cleaning kit that had brushes and swabs for all the calibers.

"You are getting good at manipulating people."

"I shamed him into it more than anything. Once he gets used to the idea that it's up to him to protect his family, he'll be good. Had professional training as a boy. Shoots fairly well for person who hasn't fired a firearm since he was a kid."

"What happened?"

"School shooting, lost a best friend, blamed the gun instead of the shooter."

"You lost me at the last curve."

"A gun doesn't shoot itself. Someone had to load it; someone had to aim it; and, someone had to pull the trigger. Of course, there are the accidents like where a firearm is loaded and dropped. That the fault of the person for careless handling. The gun is nothing more than a fancy hammer, a tool, and not a very good hammer at that."

"Guns destroy lives."

"No, people destroy lives, guns are one of the tools they use to do it."

"And, apparently Claymore mines."

"Work good don't they? I'm sure that the dog had gone feral. We're putting in the fence to avoid wasting more mines on feral animals."

"I guess you're right, I slipped into my old thinking when you mentioned the school shooting."

"They were never a good thing. There were a lot of them in recent years because I think parents gave up on parenting. In recent times, it seemed like we had more in a year than we formerly had in a decade."

"Speaking of parenting, would you like to be a parent?"

"Of course, why do you want to know?"

"Well... I'm going to stop taking the pill and get pregnant."

She gushed it all out in a single breath, talking so fast I had to think for a moment to realize what she said. Then I immediately wondered if she hadn't already stopped because I'd never, once, seen her taking one. I think that all men will agree with me when I say that women can be sneaky, but then, so can we.

"Ok, let's make babies."

"Right now?"

"No. Right now I want to check out another house where we saw smoke. We still have thirteen homes to fill."

"You're no fun."

"I will be... later. Meanwhile we have to get more people here if we're to have any kind of chance defending the place."

"What you said to Robert about generators – I thought you got all the diesel generators."

"We did. However, there are several of the propane fueled generators, ranging in size from 12kw all the way up to 50kw. A fifty would have to be shared by two homes, but I think there are enough to equip the tract. If push comes to shove, we could give up our

second diesel generators and replace them with a smaller standby to run while we change the oil."

"How many kilowatts does a house usually use?"

"Voltage times amperage equals watts. 120 volts times 100 amps equals 12 kilowatts."

"So they're big enough?"

"Not for an air conditioner, no. I've never understood the ratings. Cummins has a 25kw standby, 20kw prime generator that only puts out 83 amps. Basically to get 100 amps prime power, you need a 30kw generator. They're all the same. Kohler has a propane generator that uses the same engine to power two different alternators. They call it their 15/30 RES. The 15 only puts out 63amps while the 30 with the different alternator puts out 125amps. The output amperage is lower with natural gas because natural gas has less energy."

"Another boy toy?"

"I suppose in many ways. Ready to go?"

"Don't you want to eat?"

"Got anything quick?"

"Chicken salad, it will only take a minute to spread it on the bread."

"Ok, I'll get me a Coke and you a Pepsi."

"Make it diet."

"Ok."

We ate quickly and after a bathroom stop headed to the second place I had in mind. In view of the reception we got at Robert's, I sent Kim to the door and stood in front of the Hummer with HK417 at low ready. She knocked several times and finally, a little old lady came to the door. They had a long conversation, but she never motioned me forward. I waited and she returned to the Hummer.

"We don't help little old ladies across the street anymore?"

"It's not that. She said she had plenty of food and was in the late 4th stage of cancer. When I explained that we could care for her, she insisted we go help the living. Apparently, the cancer has spread throughout her body. The only thing she asked was that we check on her from time to time and bury her body."

"Ok, if you say so. Number three is about three blocks down."

It was a repeat of previous stop, with Kim going to the door except a much younger lady answered. She apparently invited Kim in and Kim didn't motion me forward. I slung the rifle because my arm was aching. I fished around in my pocket for a couple of Motrin and use a pint of bottled water to wash them down. It took about 20 minutes for the Motrin to kick in and I was about ready to go after Kim when the door opened. The lady and 4 children, stair-steps, came out. I'd put the youngest at 10 and the oldest around 16.

"Barry, this is Karen Johnson. Her husband didn't make it home and they've almost run out of food. The oldest boy, Steve is it, has gone shopping on foot, but hasn't brought much back. They have a gun safe but only her husband knows the combination. If we can figure out how to get into the safe, Steve says his father has some very nice guns."

"Mrs. Johnson, kids. How about we go out to our housing tract and you pick out a house? Steve, I have a gun or two you can use until we can figure out how to get into the gun safe."

"That's why they're here, to go pick out a house."

"Steve, do you know what safe it is?"

"It's a Sentry 16 gun safe with a combination lock."

"The factory would know the combination, who knows if there still is a factory? I'll talk to Nels and figure something out. Mrs. Johnson, where did your husband store his important papers?"

"We have a file cabinet."

"Ok, let's go look at houses."

"Is that a real machinegun?"

"Steve, that's the old reliable Ma Deuce, M2HB. Been around since just after the First World War."

"Can I shoot it? Sometime, I mean?"

"Sometime for sure. You'll be pulling guard duty if you move here and you'll have to know how to use it."

"Really? Great."

"I don't know if I want him pulling guard duty, Mr. Simpson."

"Part of the package, didn't Kim explain?"

"I thought it meant I would pull guard duty. Steve is only 16."

"Mrs. Johnson, this is the first World War Three we've ever had, times have changed and not necessarily for the better."

"Well, he is a good shot."

"Do you shoot?"

"Enough to keep from shooting myself with any of my husband's weapons, but not generally."

"Can you hit what you aim at?"

"Well, of course."

"So, Steve, what does your Dad have in the gun safe?"

"His favorite is the M1A. It's one notch up from the Standard."

"The Loaded?"

"Yeah, that's it. He has two guns made by H&K, a 416 and a 417. Oh wait, he has a H&K pistol, a USP, uh..."

"Tactical?"

"Yeah. Has a threaded barrel sticking out the front. It's a .45. There is a Remington combo shotgun, 12 gauge, and he has a magazine extension for when he puts on the short barrel. There's a Marlin Golden Trigger .22. There is also a Marlin 1895 Cowboy in .45-70 and an 1894 Cowboy in .357. He has two Ruger ukd model Vaqueros, one in .45 Colt and one in .357."

"You know your guns."

"Thank you, Mr. Simpson."

It was an observation not a complement, but if he wanted to take it that way, it didn't hurt a thing. The thing that concerned me was a family with a missing member could cause problems in the future. Now let's just say that some day in the future, Mrs. Johnson wants the companionship of a man, even for only a few hours, if you get my meaning. Men, being somewhat weak willed, might just succumb to the enticement. That could turn our nice little housing tract from Elm Gables into Peyton Place. If not Mrs.

Johnson, maybe another woman in the same circumstance. But Mrs. Johnson and at least two of her kids would greatly add to our security, something to think about. Rock to the left, hard spot to the right, us in the middle. BTW, the tract is called Elm Gables and is located on a street named Elm Place.

"Nels, this is Mrs. Johnson and these are her four children. Steve is the oldest, I only got his name. Mrs. Johnson, Nelson Tanner, Nels, Mrs. Johnson. Kim I'll move the truck and you show them around, I want to talk to Nels."

"Sure."

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"What's up, Barry?"

"It looks like you should have the fence done today, ahead of schedule are you?"

"I usually give a worst time estimate if asked."

"This Mrs. Johnson's husband didn't come home the day of the attack. I don't know what to make of that, but it puts the family short one member. Now get this, they have a loaded gun safe that they can't get into. I have a few ideas about that but I have a concern about Mrs. Johnson. What if sometime in the future, she feels the need for male companionship? That could mean trouble for the tract."

"Nice enough looking, but I wouldn't be interested."

"Well, me either."

"But, I can see your concern. Not right away, of course, but later on, it could be possible. That's not to say it would happen, more like it could happen. Best solution would be to find Mr. Johnson. Second best solution would be to find a new Mr. Johnson."

"Well, I suppose it's possible we might run into a single man about her age. Close anyway. That would keep her from chasing the men and him from chasing the women."

"Or not."

"True. I think Robert and his family will be moving in. I had to do some converting but I do believe he's aboard."

"What do you mean, converting?"

"Another anti-gunner. However, he had a reason, school shooting, best friend killed, etc. Got him to come around by shaming him a little. He had professional training as a boy and isn't half bad with the AR. Outfitted him pretty well. Say, I fibbed to him about the

Mossberg 590A1. You got one for each member of your family and I was sort of holding back on my extra one for Kim."

"What did you give him?"

"A 590."

"Same basic gun, different sights. Keep the extra one for Kim, your first wife paid dearly for it."

"Funny, that's what I told him when he asked how much for the guns. I told him paid in full and the circumstances."

"Well, you paid a dear price and your wife a higher price. That's only right."

"One of the guns in that safe is an H&K USP Tactical in .45."

"Does he have a silencer?"

"I doubt it."

"Know where you can get one?"

"I just might. He also has an M1A Loaded. Not the top of the line, but a very good M1A, the same as mine."

"I thought about those several times, but the price was too steep."

"Well, I thought about a Super Match, many times, but only someone like Bill Gates could afford one. Then, with a match grade rifle, you'd need match grade optics and match ammo. Not in the budget, never was."

"Did you check that gun store carefully?"

"Downstairs, yes. The upstairs had been ransacked. Why?"

"Did he ever say anything to you about the Super Match?"

"We talked about one several times. He seemed very knowledgeable on that model but he never said anything about having one."

"Where did he live?"

"Above the store after his wife died."

"Did you check up there?"

"The thought never crossed my mind."

"You would expect a gun dealer to keep his personal collection separate from his retail business. Maybe you ought to check out the upstairs. You may find the very best guns in his personal collection."

"You know what? After Kim and I drop off the Johnson's we'll do just that."

It made my palms sweaty just think of the possibilities if Nels were right. I joined Kim and the Johnson's.

"Decide on a house?"

"The last one on the left."

"It will take a few days to get you a generator, probably propane fueled and get it hooked up. You will have water and sewer and we'll loan you a portable generator to power the major appliances. I go tomorrow and see what we can do about getting your husband's guns. All you really need to plan on moving is your clothes and any personal mementos you may want to keep, like photos."

"When would you move us?"

"Tomorrow afternoon?"

"That would be fine. Kim said she could give us enough food for one day."

"I have it here, is ham ok?"

"Sorry, I know the name doesn't reflect it, but we're Jewish."

"No problem, we have some canned beef roasts, will those work?"

"I don't see why not."

"Give me a minute and I'll replace the pork products with chicken or beef."

"Tuna is ok too."

Kim fished out the two Dak hams, 2 cans of Spam and replaced them with 2 canned beef roasts, 2 cans of chicken breast and two cans of tuna. We loaded them aboard the pickup because it had more room and headed back to their house. After we left, I mentioned the discussion I had with Nels and his suggestion.

"Go for it, you might find the rifle you always wanted."

"Yes, and maybe not."

"But, you won't know until you look, will you?"

"No, I guess not. Nels said we might find the very best guns he had in his personal collection. We're here, cross your fingers."

We climbed the stairs and there was a locked gun safe in what I took to be the living room. A key lock, not a combination or a dual lock like electronic plus key. I went to the basement and searched his body until I found a large key ring.

"Here goes nothing. My God in Heaven, would you look at that."

"What do you see?"

"I don't know where to start. The guns are all in their original boxes. Two Super Match rifles, and look, they have the same scopes as on my Tac-50 with BDCs. Here are two of the Mk 23s, the big brother of the H&K USP Tactical's. Hell, there are even 2 USP Tactical's. This box here has... 6 silencers for the H&K firearms. Oh look, a pair of MP5K-PDWs with the threaded barrels."

"There is ammo in this room."

"What did you find?"

"It says Black Hills. There all different sizes, .308 and .223 mainly. There is some 9mm and some .45ACP."

"After finding roughly \$344 thousand in gold and silver this is frosting on the cake. This gun collection is easily worth \$12 to \$15 thousand. Most of that ammo is worth a buck a round."

"Let's get it loaded and see if there is anything else in the basement we can use."

"Right, good idea."

I'd noticed that our late dealer had also included Springfield Armory slings in the M1A boxes. It would be a hot time on the old town tonight. A recheck of the basement yielded several more suppressors, so I took them all. I'd almost missed it, in fact had, when Kim pointed to the Mossberg boxes. Six more 590A1s.

"We have chores to do tonight."

"What?"

Kim – Chapter 10

"First, we have to divide up that gold and silver and give Nels and Carol their half. Are we eating here or there?"

"Their house tonight."

"Let's just take it with us and divide it up after dinner, won't be any questions that way. I held back a Mossberg 590A1 from Robert so I could give it to you. It appears that we have a surplus of 590A1s at the moment, thanks to you."

"That's the shotgun with those funny sights?"

"They're call ghost ring sights. About the same thing as the military peep sights. The ghost ring has a large aperture while the military peep sight has a small aperture. In general, the thicker the ring, the more precise the sight, and the thinner the ring, the faster the sight."

"What else do we have to do?"

"You said something about making babies."

"I thought you forgot."

"Yeah, right. You carry the silver and I'll carry the gold."

Now talk about a whirlwind romance, I don't know if we set any records, but we had to be close. One day she hates me and anything that shoots, a week later she's toting a military style rifle and a 9mm handgun. Not long after, she's actually shooting a gun at someone and a while after that, she's almost on the prowl to get revenge for the small scar on her arm. It beats the hell out of the other alternative. Plus, I ended up with a replacement wife who was *head over heels in love with me*.

"What's that you're toting?"

"You obviously didn't know that we had a precious metals dealer in town. I did but hadn't considered it. When you said something, it clicked so first thing this morning, we checked. We found a bag of pre-65 silver coins and a lockbox with Eagles, mostly gold. It only fair that we divide it 50-50."

"It's finders keepers. You found it, you keep it."

"The only reason I found it was because of information we both had, your idea and my knowledge. You're not going to turn down something on the order of \$340 thousand, are you?"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Ok, let's eat then we can divide it up."

I never thought I'd have to twist his arm to get him to take half of the treasure we'd found. On the other hand, he was a great one for ideas, pointing me in the direction of things I wanted or needed. Like the gun dealer's private collection. No doubt probably carried on his books as inventory because while a class III dealer could sell those items from inventory, they couldn't own some of them due to their recent date of manufacture, FOPA of '86. I'll say it again; they politically corrected and deprived us of our rights until we, as a country, went out of business.

We divided the loot up after dinner and it came close to \$341 thousand each, give or take. I had said \$344 thousand at one time, easy come, easy go. The pm, and the watches were that, loot as in looting. The only thing that kept it from being criminal in my mind was the fact that the owner was dead. What if he had family? Another can of worms, maybe he hated them and planned to give it to charity. Guess we'd never know and I hadn't seen the Red Cross yet. If anyone came and claimed it, I guessed we'd have to give it up, not much choice. Wouldn't dare advertise the find, it would be an invitation to thieves. At the very least, I figured we'd be entitled to a finder's fee for getting it out of the safe, say 10%, a year's wages before the war, \$68,200, divided two ways with no taxes to pay.

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"We've found two families, what say we go get all those generators, filters and such and store them here? If we can find a flatbed, we'd have room for them and those oil drums."

"What do you mean, if we can find a flatbed? We have two empty flatbeds sitting right here."

"Oops."

"Didn't you see *Independence Day*? Don't say oops!"

"This tract is beginning to look like a parking lot."

"That's ok, the garages are empty. Most of them anyway. Get that tractor hooked up and let's go, we're wasting sunshine."

"Are we bringing Caleb to stand guard?"

"Good idea. Caleb! Boy, get your gun."

Nels loaded the SAW into the sleeper cab.

"What's that for?"

"You got shot looking for that oil. I'm not taking any chances. Why did you bring a LAW?"

"Same reason."

"We make one hell of a team. I dream it up and you go find it. How did you make out at the gun dealer's store?"

"Two each of the following: M1A Super Match with scopes, H&K Mk 23s, H&K USP Tacticals, MP5K-PDWs with threaded barrels, and 6 silencers for the H&K firearms."

"No doubt inventory items."

"No doubt. Downstairs, I cleaned out the silencers and Kim found 6 590A1s."

"Care to share that?"

"If you want."

"I was only kidding, you'll need them for your kids, when you have some."

"You know if someone comes along and claims that gold and silver and they have legitimate claim, we're going to have to give it up."

"Not all of it, we deserve a finder's fee."

"My thoughts exactly."

The dealer had 8 30kw gas generators in stock, some labeled natural gas and some labeled propane. Nels said he could make them all run on propane. There were two of each size of the residential generators smaller than the 30kw. We loaded them all, including all of the portables. The same thing went for filters and some spare parts. We tried several auto supply stores, getting a lot of oil and additional filters. We put off the oil change place for last. Finally, we could no longer avoid it, but I grabbed the Yellow Pages and looked for similar establishments, finding 3 more.

We started at a place different than the one where we'd gotten shot up. We got maybe a dozen full or part drums and some canned oil. The next two places yielded more or less the same results, roughly a dozen drums and a few cases of cans. We also picked up filters compatible with generators. When we could no longer avoid it, we went to the place I'd found the 6 full and 3 partial drums.

"Let's be quick about getting this loaded and, if things work out, I'll show you that dirt bag I shot."

"Caleb, keep an eye out."

"Ya, pa."

It didn't take that long, although a 55-gallon drum oil is very heavy. We had an engine hoist and a chain. We had tried it both ways, hoist on the ground and hoist on the flat-bed and both worked. When we had it all loaded up, I led Nels to the roof of the building where I'd had the shootout.

"I left him lying right over there."

"I see blood stains, but no body."

"That can only mean he had friends who must have carried him off."

"I think we'd better get the hell outta here."

"Right."

BAMM – Caleb collapsed in a heap. This was most definitely not one of your better neighborhoods.

"How is he?"

"He's alive, sucking chest wound. Hold the door for me and I'll get him in the truck."

"Can we treat it?"

"If we don't, we'll lose him. I have Asherman seals, in my first aid kit. They're a one way valve that will allow his lung to re-inflate. Don't see much bleeding, don't think it hit his lung. I go with Asherman on the front, gauze and KY on the back."

"Is he out?"

"At the moment."

"Don't worry about meds, we have plenty."

"So do we, thanks to our family doctor. Got IVs and the whole nine yards. IV antibiotics too."

"You said you were infantry?"

"Yeah, I was. Thing is, I was always interested in medicine. Took some advanced first aid classes. Passed EMT basic and EMT intermediate."

"What's higher?"

"Paramedic."

I felt like saying, and he cooks, too. Nels was something and to think he lived just across the street two houses down. Once my arm finished healing, it was getting there, anyone going up against us as a pair would be in for trouble. However, I'd been caught twice with my pants down, a serious lapse in situational awareness. And both times it was at the same damned place. Had Caleb not been shot, we'd have probably hunted them down and tried to eliminate the problem.

"Pa, hurt."

"I know boy, you hang on until we get you home and can fix those little holes in your front and your back."

"Through and through?"

"Probably a FMJ. Small hole, maybe .223. Saw 7.62 holes in Desert Storm, this is smaller."

"In our guys?"

"No, in theirs."

A bullet entrance wound always appears to be smaller than the bullet that created the hole due to the elasticity of the skin. Hence, a 7.62 might make some think it was a .223 and a .223 might make it to appear to be smaller, say .17. Determination of the type of bullet can't always be determined, but a FMJ, especially stuff like the SS109, punches a fairly clean hole, in and out. You may need an Asherman device or a substitute, depending on circumstances. However, if the bullet was hollow point or soft point, you may not because you may be able to put your fist in the exit wound. The devices Nels had were more than 5" across. Caleb was in good hands.

"Is he losing much blood?"

"Doesn't appear to be. Can't really say. I'll probably start him on an IV of something, normal saline or Ringer's would be a good choice. A little lower would have put it in his gut and a little higher into his lung. I'll give him a shot of morphine for the pain. Have to debride this and I don't have much practice. Greatest danger is the tension. I think he has a traumatic pneumothorax, next is blood loss and then infection. Been a while since I took the training and I don't use it every day."

"We'll be there in 10 minutes."

"Don't do anything foolish, he's stable."

"Hard to do anything foolish driving a loaded semi. I'll have to stop and open the gates. I'll park in front of your house so we don't need to carry him far. Got a stretcher in that garage of yours?"

"Didn't know I needed one, but yeah, I have one. It's a surplus Stokes litter."

"The basket?"

"Yeah."

"You're full of surprises."

"Well, the issue never came up before."

We arrived and the gates were open because Robert was moving in. I drove on to Nels and held Caleb while he went after the Stokes. We got Caleb down into it, he was awake now, and we hauled him to the house. Carol apparently looked out and saw us coming, she was holding the door open. She didn't say much, just looked at Nels with a wondering look.

"Carol, I need an IV set, a 1 liter bag of normal saline and a bag of the IV antibiotic the doctor prescribed. Going to need some Lidocaine/epinephrine mix, syringes, chest tube, water lock, my stethoscope, blood pressure cuff, sutures, Neosporin, bandages and tape."

I didn't know if she was following him because her eyes were glued on Caleb. When he finished giving his list, she left and returned with everything he had asked for. Meanwhile, he had started Caleb on oxygen, but I didn't see the setting. He swabbed Caleb's arm and established the IV on his first stick. As soon as the IV was established, he piggybacked the antibiotic and gave him a small shot of morphine, IM. Next, he used the Lidocaine mixture to deaden the area around the entrance wound, cleaned the wound, inserted a tube and sutured it in place. He had some kind of water seal for it. After we turned Caleb over, he cleaned the back exit wound and closed it with sutures, adding Neosporin, a couple of gauze pads and tape to hold it in place.

"Is he going to be ok?"

"Probably. I'm not a doctor and the normal protocol would be to seal the wound and transport him to an ER. They'd check him over and probably order an X-ray or CT scan. Might get a surgeon involved, chest wounds can be dangerous. Don't know if I'm going to be ok. No bone fragments, that's a good thing. Think I got most of the trash out the

wounds. I'll leave the chest tube in for a few days until I'm sure his lung is re-inflated. Didn't get any veins or arteries, Thank God. One in a million shot. Now, I'm po'd."

"I know just how you feel. Time for a hunting trip?"

"Carol would have to stay here to watch Caleb."

"Kim would go, I'm virtually certain, she wants revenge."

"For that piddly little scratch she got?"

"That's the one."

"Could be a bunch of them."

"If we wait a few days, we may be able to get Robert and Steve to go along. Oh damn, I promised Mrs. Johnson I'd try and open her gun safe today. I'll get Kim and we'll take care of that. We can unload tomorrow."

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"I promised Mrs. Johnson I'd try to open her husband's gun safe today."

"I heard. I went over and found the combination in a file folder in the filing cabinet. That is what you were thinking wasn't it?"

"It was, you listen good."

"What happened to Caleb?"

"Got shot in the chest. Sucking chest wound. Did you know that Nels is an Intermediate EMT? Anyway, he doctored him up, has him on an IV of saline and an IV antibiotic. Even had morphine for the pain. Oh, he has an old Stokes litter probably left over from WW I, WWII or Korea."

"We have to go back and clean up that problem."

"Yes, we do. Just not today; it's getting late, Nels isn't up to it and neither am I. I hoped we could recruit Robert and Steve to lend a hand."

"Count me in."

"I already did. I told Nels you wanted revenge."

"I do."

"Remember the line, *He tasks me! He tasks me! And I shall have him. I'll chase him round the moons of Nibia and round the Antares malestrom and round perdition's flames before I give him up!?*"

"Can't say that I do."

"It was from 'Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan'. It's Khan describing his hatred of Captain Kirk and the lengths he is willing to go to have his revenge. Despite anything you've heard, the line, *revenge is a dish best served cold* actually first occurred in the same movie."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Don't let your desire for revenge get you killed, Kim. I wouldn't want to have to end up with Mrs. Johnson."

"Do you find her attractive?"

"Not in the least. I've expressed concern about having an unmarried woman living in this tract. Nels said I'd have to either find the old Mr. Johnson or a new Mr. Johnson."

"I catch you eyeing that woman I'll carve your heart out."

"I don't doubt that for a minute."

"Carol was supposed to cook tonight. I'd better go give her a hand; she'll be so upset about Caleb."

"Ok. I want to talk to Robert."

"Robert, how goes the moving?"

"We're done. You said something about power."

"Come over and I'll give you a portable for tonight. We had a bit of bad luck today and won't be unloading the generators until tomorrow."

"Oh, what happened?"

"Long story short, we got the generators and filters. Both Kim and I got shot a while back at one particular oil changing place and we saved it for last. I led Nelson up to the roof to show him the bad guy's body and it was gone. We started to bug out, but there was a single shot, hitting Caleb."

"Nelson's son?"

"Yes. It was a through and through wound creating a sucking chest wound. Nels turns out to be an Intermediate EMT and he patched him up enough to get him home. He went right to work on the wounds and I think Caleb is stable."

"I'm really sorry to hear that. Doesn't that kid have problems enough without getting shot? For two cents, I'd..."

"You'd what?"

"Go with you and Nelson to clean out the bad guys."

"I'll give you a quarter and you can keep the change. By the way, I did come up with a Mossberg 590A1, want to swap?"

"Could I take it and keep the 590 for my son?"

"How old is he?"

"Eleven, but it won't be long. He's old enough now to get him started on a .22 or maybe a .223."

"How about a step up from the AR15? Say an M16A3?"

"Is that 3 round burst or full auto?"

"Odd numbers are full auto. They also have semi-auto in the first position when you turn the safety off."

"We'll take five if you don't mind. I spend a lot of time last night reevaluating myself and our life. I don't know how it happened, but somewhere, I ended up going down the wrong path."

"That's the nice part, you can change at any time. Let's go get that portable."

After setting Robert up with the portable diesel generator, fuel and extension cords, I went to Nels to check on Caleb. He was conscious and clearly uncomfortable. Carol was spoon feeding him a clear broth, so at least he had an appetite. This really bothered me because I felt that Caleb didn't understand what he'd done to get hurt like he was. The answer was that he'd done nothing except, perhaps, missed seeing the shooter. He didn't deserve what happened, but he was carrying a firearm and the shooter didn't know about Caleb being special and may not have cared if he had known. He apparently hadn't stuck around or we'd have been shot at too.

"Robert said to count him in. I'm going to make a trip to the post to pick up some M16A3s tomorrow. If I can find any more hand grenades, I'll get them too."

"We didn't take any of the AT-4s, Barry. Might just as well pick them up, they'd be especially good for buildings. I'll come with you if you don't mind."

"I don't mind at all. Despite our low opinion of the M9s, we may need them for some of the new people. It's just a shame that it's not a Marine post, we could get M14s from the Marines."

"What about the gun stores in the other town?"

"If they haven't been broken into and ransacked, it might be worth a try. I feel so bad about Caleb. I shouldn't have suggested that he come with us. You and I could have done it by ourselves. If I hadn't taken time to show you the body, we'd have been gone."

"You're beating yourself up over something you had no part of Barry. Caleb is our son and ultimately, I bear what responsibility there is. However, I didn't shoot Caleb and neither did you. That's the guy who is most responsible. Time to do the cleanup."

Kim – Chapter 11

I suddenly realized that while I always carried a BOB, I'd never given the one I put together for Michelle to Kim. It was generic and the only difference between it and mine was the extra Browning 13-round magazines. All this passed through my conscious mind on the way to the Guard post. We took all the M16A3s we could find; apparently the Army or this unit preferred the A4. What the hell, we took those too, plus the well used M9s they had available.

We got every hand grenade, of any description, we hadn't already taken, not many, but that may be the grenade that saves someone's life. Nels wanted those M136 AT-4s for building demolition, he said. He said that before the Army went to the M24 SWS, they used the M21. He went on to point out that they sometimes used M14s for parades and honor guards. Our quick trip turned into a multi hour adventure with us ultimately checking every bunker and every storage place where things might be stored.

And, it wasn't a waste of time. It would seem that our earlier trips simply skimmed the surface of the available arms, ammo and ordnance. Many were things I wouldn't have taken on my own, but Nels insisted each had its own value. We'd taken the pickup and trailer and returned with the pickup and trailer, a second Hummer and rather large military trailer. Stripped of its packing, most of the things we brought back took less room.

It looked like they had two kinds of magazines, the very well used old ones the soldiers used, and several cases of new ones that had never been issued since they were manufactured in 2005. Major companies, some Teflon coated, green followers, the good ones marked Okay Industries, Labelle Industries (Teflon), Center Industries.

The first thing we did when we got home was check on Caleb. He was hurting, the tube was draining and he didn't have a fever. Nels gave him a small morphine shot and Caleb began to get comfortable. We went outside to unload our haul and the truckload from the day before. There was a 30kw propane generator missing along with several cases of oil and one case of filters. We went to check on Robert.

"When you didn't get back, I helped myself to a 30kw and supplies. I think I have it wired in correctly and only need a propane tank for power."

"Let me check," Nels said. He looked it over and said, "He cheated, he read the instructions. Think we can get him some propane and a tank before dark?"

"The propane is here, all we need is a 550."

"We don't have an empty trailer, let's take the second flatbed and get all they have."

There were 15 550-gallon tanks, one extra. We loaded them all, figuring I might like a second tank to make the explosion bigger. It just seemed like the list kept getting longer and we weren't adding many more people. Still, if we took the time to set up everything

in Elm Gables, it might help attracting people. That would have the to do list down to getting the bad guys, getting power to the well that supplied our area's water tank, getting the last of the LTS food and eventually getting alternative sources of power.

I'd read somewhere that a city in California had a large wind turbine that supplied all the power their water agency needed, nearly one megawatt. We wouldn't need that much, but it sounded like one way to power that well pump on a regular basis, wind turbine, batteries and a huge inverter. I'd make a note of that too. We'd have to find a wind turbine somewhere in the local area, it was a long way to California. What was that I'd thought about earlier, oh yes, gel-cell golf cart batteries.

I might be doable, if we had enough time and could find what we needed. Before that, we needed a viable Elm Gables, included power and gas for all homes and those food supplies. Robert didn't sit back and wait for us to unload and set up his generator, another good sign. We unloaded a 550 for him and Nels and Robert began to connect the plumbing. I got the delivery truck and filled the tank as soon as the plumbing was connected. Since the power was out, the generator fired right up.

"And God said, *Let there be light*", Robert chuckled.

"If you come over to the pickup, I'll give you those A3s."

"Did you get magazines?"

"Yes, we did. Count out 50, it will give you 10 per rifle. Come over and pickup 2 more cases of ammo too. We can deal with the remainder later; we have more firearms and ordnance. We give you a brief demonstration on the ordnance before we issue it. We could use your help tomorrow Robert. We have a bunch of stuff to unload and distribute."

"Its Bob. What time?"

"Six am?"

"I'll set the alarm. Do you all keep this schedule?"

"We generally get up with the sun and retire a while after sundown."

"I think we can adjust."

"We have Mrs. Johnson moving in tomorrow, I think. First order of business will be to get her power set up and tank installed."

"You fellas running propane?"

"Diesel. The propane units were what he had the most of. His entire inventory is on that

flatbed."

"I thought you'd go green."

"Haven't located the equipment, but it has been considered."

"I may be able to help. We'll talk tomorrow. Nels, how is the boy doing?"

"Bob, it's so far, so good, Thanks for asking."

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"Honey, since the day we met in the grocery store, I've been on a dead run. There aren't enough hours in a day or days in a week. The more we do, the more we seem to need to do. I'm beat."

"Sounds like you need a day off. Who has guard duty tonight?"

"Oh crap."

"What?"

"Caleb normally has 6-9, Nels 9-12, I have 12-3 and you have 3-6. Caleb's down, count him out. I'll go check with Nels and see if he wants to run 3 4-hours shifts."

"The gates are in, why bother?"

"They aren't mined."

"Ok, go see Nels."

"I'm not up to it Barry and it completely slipped my mind. We didn't do it last night either, how's the hair on the back of your neck?"

"Flat at the moment."

"Let's skip it and all get a good night's sleep. We'll get with Bob tomorrow and work something out."

"We'll have Steve tomorrow night. Maybe he can take Caleb's place until Caleb heals up."

"Caleb will be out of commission for up to two months. I sense there is more to this than the wound, he can't seem to understand why it happened and asked more than once what he did wrong."

"I was afraid of that. His only failing was to see the sniper before the sniper shot him."

"I'll try it that way; maybe tell him the sniper was well hidden."

"Probably more truth in that than you realize."

"Probably."

"Goodnight, see you tomorrow morning."

"G'night."

o

The following day, we unloaded the generators, starting with the largest and working our way down. Rather than stacking them, we set them in place, meaning that all it would take would be installing the ATS, connecting the wires, setting a 550 and plumbing the propane. To deal best with our immediate situation, the first genset went to the house Mrs. Johnson would occupy. We broke for lunch, all of the gensets and tanks in place. Kim covered my back while I went for a load of propane. By late afternoon, Mrs. Johnson's generator was running plus a few more.

We sat down after a long day and discussed the guard detail. Bob was aboard and Mrs. Johnson had relented concerning Steve pulling guard duty. That meant we could run 4 3-hour shifts without Nels and Caleb. Steve took Caleb's place, Bob took Nels' and Kim and I kept ours. I had made one observation; even the most liberal, gun-hating people could come around with the proper approach. I didn't say would, just could. And, I was still unsettled about that Mrs. Johnson situation.

We had been busy so I hadn't had time to check the sighting on the new guns we picked up from the gun dealer's private collection. Firearms were the least of our worries; we almost literally had guns and ammo running out of our ears. We were in for another series of long days and short nights.

On the following day, after going to both a plumbing supply and an electrical supply, Nels finished installing all the generators. Where a 50kw was placed, two 550 tanks were placed and electrical cables run to the adjoining house. With the left-right home setup, designed that way no doubt for the ease of the meter readers, the cables didn't have to be very long.

I made enough trips for propane that all of the tanks were filled and ready to go. The full truck was parked down the block with the now empty flatbeds. Meanwhile, Kim and Carol went from house to house, removing spoiled food and garbage, accumulating it in trash cans. They didn't clean the homes, leaving that to the new occupants, when we found them. Again, after a long day, we sat down over a cold brew from my wet bar to discuss the next day's business.

"You have a tap setup?"

"Yes, with CO2, but I've never used it."

"How many kegs does it hold?"

"Two."

"We should get you a couple of kegs and stock that for you."

"Two kegs would last me forever."

"Would you mind terribly if we did? It would be nice to have a place to get together to discuss important events and maybe do it over a glass of cold beer."

"If you want, Bob. Tomorrow we need to unloaded what we got from the Guard post and either store or distribute it. Do you have an empty stall in your garage where we could store it?"

"Sure, but why not put it in the garage of one of the empty homes?"

"I'd prefer to have it under someone's control."

"Sure, we'll do it your way."

"How's Caleb?"

"Doing better than I expected. I've explained that a very bad man was hiding and shooting anyone he saw. I think he accepts that and realizes he didn't do anything wrong. The wound is still draining a little; I won't pull the tube and close him up until the drainage stops. He doesn't seem to have an infection, he's really lucky."

"You know, I thought about going by the Police and Sheriff's Department's and getting what body armor they have, but realized that most of it is NIJ level IIA and wouldn't help much against a rifle."

"Yeah," Nels added, "And I didn't see any Interceptor at the post."

"I noticed and found that odd. There should have been enough body armor for a Regiment. Maybe they sent it and the soldiers' personal weapons home with them just before the balloon went up."

"That would explain it. It would also explain why we found so few rifles and pistols."

"You mean to say that there is a Guard Regiment running around out there with their

military weapons and body armor?"

"I suppose, but probably not organized to a great degree. They'd be doing their best to take care of their families. They've all had NBC training and know what to do. Besides, this is a regional distribution point, not many of them would be from this town."

"Regional?"

"Depending on the state, all the ammunition used by the Guard may come from one central distribution point. This post just happened to be that point. The post is several times larger than the town."

"And it's deserted?"

"Yeah, it's like a graveyard out there."

"Did you guys take everything?"

"All of the ammo and individual weapons, but not all of the vehicles or crew served weapons. There are still light, medium and heavy machine guns, for example, but we took what we could use."

"So the Guard won't be along to help us?"

"Unlikely Bob, not for a while, at least. Don't look for FEMA or any of the DHS people either. I still have a list of homes that were making smoke, but I'd rather wait until we've taken care of the trouble that got three of us shot."

"Dinner tonight is at Bob's house. Carol has already feed Caleb and Karen has fed Steve so he can pull guard."

"Thanks Kim. Well, fellas, want to eat?"

"Dinner won't be for an hour, I was just giving you a heads up."

"I've got to go check on Caleb."

"Yes, I have a few things to do too. See you for dinner in an hour."

o

I sat down on the sofa and Kim cuddled up.

"Want to practice some more?"

"After dinner, sure. Don't know that I have the energy at the moment."

"What's happening tomorrow?"

"Probably trash cleanup in the next town. As long as they're there, they represent a threat."

"And no body armor?"

"Well... that's not entirely correct. You're close enough to Michelle's size you can use hers and I have my own."

"What do you have?"

"It's called NATO-SWAT, made by Point Blank, the company that makes the Interceptor. I have the NIJ level IV plates."

"You didn't say anything to me before and you clearly avoided telling the other men you had it."

"I only have two sets that cost a dear penny or three. I've held back because we weren't going into a situation where I expected us to be in combat. Tomorrow will be different. I'll mention it at dinner so they won't think I'm hiding anything."

"You're a survivalist to the core, I was right all along."

"You may be more right than wrong. However, we face a couple of major hurdles and I'm not so sure I can handle them."

"For instance?"

"Supplying power to the well pump that refills the water tank that supplies Elm Gables."

"Can't we supply everyone from our well?"

"It doesn't have the capacity and if it did, we couldn't supply enough water pressure."

"What if we have a fire?"

"I think I'd better add getting a fire pumper to our list. That would make the water tank all the more important, it supplies the hydrants."

"I guess I never realized how complicated life is."

"There are a lot of things we take for granted, police, fire, utilities and so forth. In the period following a major disaster or, in our case, WW III, none of the things we have taken for granted are there for us. It becomes our obligation to see to it that we cover those

bases for ourselves. Eventually, I'd expect the military to get its act together and be there for us, but not for a while."

"It's time to go."

"Let me wash up."

"Ok."

That last bit may have been wishful thinking, but in time the military would fulfill its obligation to protect and defend the Constitution. The degree to which that would happen depended on things like how many strikes there had been, where the strikes had been, how much of our political infrastructure was intact, etc. For now, we had to assume those duties, regardless of how difficult and how painful they were. Nels had been in Desert Storm while I had been in the Army in the in-between years. I had been worried about a reserve call up for Iraqi Freedom, but lucked out. It had been oh-so close. How was the rest of the world doing? "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

"I need to tell you fellas something. Before the war, my wife Michelle and I acquired some Point Blank NATO-SWAT body armor, complete with plates. It was very hard to come by and equally expensive. When we go after those people that have been shooting us up, Kim and I will be wearing that body armor and I didn't want it to come as a surprise."

"Ours are their Special Mission Vests," Nels replied. "Bob, we'll stop by the Police Department before we go and get you some of the body armor they bought when they formed the SWAT team. It should be brand new; the team was still in training."

"I didn't know that."

"It wasn't well known, Barry."

"How did you come to know of it?"

"Let's just say a friend of a friend."

"Will they have something to fit Steve and Caleb?"

"I think so."

"We're taking Steve?"

"With Steve, it will be five against how many? Anyone have any idea? Might cut the odds considerably. Nels, you'd better plan on taking the SAW. Bob, after dinner, I'd better give you some quick instruction on the LAW and the various types of grenades we have. We'll do it near the Hummer so Steve can participate."

"I'll cover for Steve," Kim suggested.

Although the plan was coming together, I couldn't say I loved it, Hannibal Smith notwithstanding. The body armor covered the torso, not the extremities. We hadn't done a recon and would mostly be flying by the seat of our pants. That said, we had pretty good firepower, all things considered. We'd have the two Hummers with their M2HB machineguns, a SAW, bombs and rockets. Most of us would be using .308s or have full auto capacity. Ammunition wouldn't be a problem. We go to the oil change place on the pretense of looking for oil. If the bad guys were true to form, they would soon attack. Not the best plan, but it was a plan. Besides, no plan survives first contact with the enemy.

After a short, 30-minute, explanation of the LAW rocket and the various hand grenades, how to use them and what each was for, Steve returned to guard duty and Bob went home. Kim and I retired to our home, cleaned up and crawled into bed. We hadn't adopted the habit of visiting much when we gone to bed in the past, but tonight was different. We talked of a litany of things, not the least of which was the forthcoming operation. Then we... well, she did want a baby.

Around 8am the following morning, everyone was properly equipped, including Steve and Bob using the SWAT body armor from the local PD. Everyone had offensive and defensive hand grenades, smoke and one LAW, except for Nels. Nels had 4 AT4s in his Hummer. It was a full scale military operation, albeit with only five people, two drivers, two gunners and one, shall we say, ride along – Bob?

I directed Steve to the location while Nels drove directly there. Both Kim and I had the unenviable task of crewing the Ma Deuces. That armor that encircled the gun did nothing to protect a person from an overhead shot. While we weren't vulnerable on the way over... that changed when we arrived. We parked and waited. And waited. And waited.

"They didn't come."

"I noticed."

"Now what?"

"Go up on the roof and look for smoke?"

"As good as any, I guess."

In the near distance, maybe 3-4 blocks, there was steam from a fire that was being quickly extinguished with water. Maybe we had been observed and the Ma Deuces caused them not to attack. It could have been any number of things; our plan had fallen apart even before first contact with the enemy. First contact on our part, that is. There was only one way to find out and we'd never be more ready than we were at the moment. We might be better staffed, but never more ready. Perhaps our desire to eliminate

the threat overcame our good judgment, but who is to say until we know the outcome? The consensus was, "We're as ready as we'll ever be."

It is hard to encircle any site with two vehicles. However, from our observations, we determined the best approaches, one from the south and one from the west. Drive them into the open areas to the north and east, if there were that many of them. That would allow us to make maximum use of the heavy machine guns. Before we left, we emptied one ammo can and took the end of the belt and linked it to a belt in a second can, giving us 200 rounds before we'd have to reload, the same number of rounds in a single can of SAW ammo.

Using the SINCGARS radios to keep in touch, we slowly advanced on the enemy. About a block away, they opened up on us with full auto rifle fire. We began to rake the camp, using short bursts. They began to go down, or if they were prone, flipped over or something. After a minute or two of firing, I stopped to reload while Kim continued to fire. When I was done, she needed to reload, but the enemy, such that it was, was now falling back into the open areas. Nels got out with his SAW and opened up on them. I continued to place careful bursts, preserving ammo.

Then, I took a round right in my front plate, slamming me back. A moment or two later, I took a second round to my rear plate, slamming me forward. It took a moment to recover and in the interim, Kim had located and taken out the forward sniper. Nels had turned about, found and killed the sniper located to our rear. I was having trouble getting my breath. I realized I wasn't really hurt, just badly bruised, but it did hurt.

The small remaining group of opposition all entered a far off house. Nels got back in his Hummer and moved to within about 200 meters. He then proceeded to fire all four of the AT4s into the house. It broke into flames from the HE rounds and as we watched, burned to the ground.

"We have to do a walk through in case there are any wounded."

"Yeah, we shouldn't leave anyone behind. If we find a live one, we should try and question him... or her and try and find out what the deal is."

"Curious are you?"

"There could be more groups."

Kim – Chapter 12

"Oh, right, I hadn't thought of that. Don't you just love the Ma Deuce?"

"I think I love my body armor more."

"You must be hurting."

"Now that you mention it, I am; but it beats the hell out of being dead."

"We got lucky; they must have outnumbered us 5 to 1."

"Is that all?"

"We can do a body count, if you want."

"No, we'd probably just end up inflating it like they did in Vietnam."

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"I counted 32 and that doesn't include the people who ran into that house."

"Did you see how many that was?"

"Five or six. It was between 7 to 1 and 8 to 1. Those Ma Deuces didn't leave anyone who was in any condition to talk. Let's check their camp and see if we can find any papers."

"I would really love to know."

"Steve, Bob, would you please collect their weapons and ammo?"

"Well, I'll be damned."

"What did you find?"

"There people appear to be inmates that the Police Department released from jail when we were attacked by whomever. You know; the war."

"I've always assumed we were attacked by Russia and China."

"I have too, but we don't really know, do we? It doesn't matter."

"Are you ok?"

"I'm going to have some awful bruises, honey."

"At least you're alive. Thank God for body armor."

"I'd thank Point Blank in person if anyone was around."

While I didn't have more plates, there were some at the local PD. ESAPI plates for front and back, ESBI plates for the sides. The PD had purchased IOTV, the Improved Outer Tactical Vest, which replaced the Interceptor. I think The Army had its mind made up to never procure the Dragon Skin as a matter of principle. It was heavy and very expensive.

"Oh ouch."

"Yes, that's quite the bruise. What about the one on my back?"

"Not quite as big, but it must hurt too."

"I can't believe they let those people out of jail."

"What would you have done, left them locked up to die?"

"I don't really know what I would have done in the same circumstance."

"You know Barry, it's just my opinion, but I think those were just the hard core convicts, not people like drunk drivers and such who were serving jail terms. That jail they had over there had a capacity of over 100, and someone at the law office mentioned that it was nearly full."

"Not only can she shoot any gun, she cooks, is great in bed, picks locks and is a bundle of information."

"I'm going to give you the night off, but only because of your bruises."

"Say, shouldn't you be on your period?"

"I should be, but I'm late. I've had trouble getting regular so that may not mean much. If it doesn't start soon, you may be on your way to becoming a papa."

"That would be nice."

"Well, I'm having second thoughts about bringing a baby into the world we have now."

"We have a whole planet to repopulate. If everyone felt that way, where would that put us? We've had our war and I rather doubt we'll have another on that scale in the immediate future, if ever. While war is as old as time, this was the first, and hopefully last, global thermonuclear war."

"Amen."

Global thermonuclear war was but one of many scenarios one found on the survivalist sites. The only difference between it and some of the other forms of war, chemical and biological, was the destruction of the infrastructure that accompanied this form of warfare. One would have thought that Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have been lesson enough, but they weren't. Not only was something wrong with our society, something was basically wrong with the world's society for such a thing to happen. One had to wonder if some of those missiles also released chemical or biological weapons.

Another thought just pushed it way into my head, relating to the water supply. What about the water purification system; was it intact? Were there enough chemicals, or did it even need chemicals? Our well had water as pure as the driven snow, almost zero particulates and totally pure according to the test we'd had run. I suppose if push came to shove, our well could supply the other 15 homes, but there was no way it could supply the hydrants. Always a new question... rarely a new answer.

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We were now up to 4 families and needed another 12 plus a Mr. Johnson. I don't know why that bothered me so; she hadn't come on to me in any way. Maybe I had an over-active imagination. I'd put it out there for Nels and Kim to consider and planned to drop it for the moment. The following day, Kim and I resumed our search for survivors. Our first stop was the little old lady's house, Kim had promised to look in on her. This time, she didn't answer the door and Kim let herself in. She came back and motioned me to come to the house.

"Poor thing, she lying dead in her bed. I'd promised we'd bury her, how do you want to handle that?"

"We'll come back for her later and bury her in Elm Gables. We have the equipment there and I should be able to get Nels to dig a grave."

"We don't want to wait too long."

"Why? It's freezing in here. I promise we'll be back within a few days."

I got my list and we went to the next place we'd spotted making smoke. It was no longer making smoke, but, I stood by while Kim pounded on the door. The door was answered by a kid. Kim entered and I waited. About five minutes later, she motioned for me to come to the house. Not knowing what to expect, I kept my HK417 at low ready.

"Dear this is the Fitzsimmons family. There are four of them and she's expecting. They sheltered in the basement and she's spent most of her time down there because of the baby. They would like to come look at a home."

I slung my rifle and extended my hand, "Barry Simpson."

He chuckled and said, "Barry Fitzsimmons, my wife Marilee and our two children, Tom and Anne. Let me get my gear and we'll join you."

Marilee was well advanced in a pregnancy. Fitzsimmons had a SA-58 FAL, looked like one of those guns that were sold by DSA, the paratrooper model. He was wearing a pistol belt with a US military leather holster, M1940? It seemed like anyone using a .308 would opt for the .45ACP rather than a 9mm. The children were young, say 8 and maybe 4? They sat in the back, Tom between them and Anne on her father's lap. We drove to Elm Gables and first made the rounds, introducing them to the existing residents. Then, we showed them the available homes and they selected the one next to Karen Johnson.

I kept up a conversation with the other Barry throughout and learned that he was a recently discharged Marine. He had done two tours in Iraq before going to the reserves. Got called back up for a third tour and ended up getting shot. Nothing permanently disabling, but enough to keep him from getting called up again. He said it wouldn't take them long to pack. Although they had some long term supplies, they had almost gone through them. He'd bring his other guns, he said. I asked and he said, 590A1, surplus semi-auto M14, .22 rifle and FS92 (M9) handgun His personal handgun was a SA GI model, standard capacity.

He'd bought a 10-pack of 7-round magazines from Ammoman plus 25 of the type 57 magazines. Ammo? He'd had some money when Ammoman had been offering 10 cases of .308 Igman for around 49¢ a round, delivered. He like the 15-pellet express magnum 00 buckshot, the 3" stuff, while I had the 8-pellet managed recoil 00. I took it that the Beretta was his wife's handgun, who used the M14, him or her? If he claimed both, we could always give her an A3.

After they moved in, I approached him to ask more about his guns. Barry said his wife didn't shoot and all the guns were his. I asked if there were any reason why she didn't and he said the .308s were a bit heavy. She didn't think her shooting handguns was good example for Tom and Anne. I mentioned we had a good supply of A3s and A4s, plus M9s. He reversed his position slightly, suggesting that after she had the baby, they'd revisit the issue. Not wanting to press further, I dropped the issue.

As we gained families, we had to take time off and search for more LTS foods and food that would be useable in the short term. The lowboys weren't appropriate for that, so we returned them to the truck stop and shopped for a 40' box trailer that was dead heading to its next load. We didn't find one, but we did find a full trailer of food. A second refrigerated truck was full of meat, some boxed and some hanging quarters. There was beef, pork, chicken and frozen turkeys. Nels checked and said it was still frozen but in a month when the weather began to warm, we'd lose the entire load. Factoid: Iowa is the No. 1 hog producing state and produces 25 percent of the nation's hogs while North

Carolina remains No. 2.

"We're going to have a big job on our hands, partner, that's a whole lot of meat to cut."

"Can we do it?"

"We can refuel the tractor and refrigerator unit. That will allow the meat to thaw over time. We'll need a freezer for every home to store the cut and packaged meat. The chickens can be bagged and put in the freezers right away. The pork loins and roasts will probably be the next to thaw so we'll deal with them next. Finally, we'll start breaking down the beef quarters, one half at a time. If there is boneless, we can use up the tallow, otherwise, we'll have to discard some. I'd say, given the amount of meat on the truck, it could up to two weeks to get it all cut and wrapped."

"We can get Bob and Barry to find freezers. I'll help you cut the meat. We can pull the box trailer of dry goods to Elm Gables and the ladies can distribute the food among the houses."

"There go your plans to look for more people."

"Darn, I almost forgot. Kim agreed to keep an eye on a little old lady who was dying of cancer. We found her dead and I need a grave for her."

"It won't need to be anything fancy, I can probably dig it in a few minutes."

"When we get back, why don't you dig the grave and I'll go bring her over here."

"Check her place out for anything we can use."

"Ok, although I don't know what that might be."

"Take Kim with you and we'll have Mrs. Johnson and Carol start distributing the food."

"Ok."

"Meanwhile I'll get Bob and Barry looking for freezers."

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The lady has simply wasted away. She couldn't have weighed 90 pounds. I put her in the back seat of the Hummer while Kim began searching the house. She made several interesting discoveries. First off was the gun collection which probably belonged to her husband. There was nothing new, but it was impressive, nonetheless. Mostly Colts and Winchesters. We added those and the small amount of ammo to the back of the Hummer. Her basement was filled with canning jars filled with all manner of fruits, vegetables, jams, jellies and preserves. There were several boxes of canning jars and nearly a

case of replacement lids.

Her canner was a Presto 18-quart canner (now discontinued) and it was older than dirt. It did have a new seal. We couldn't haul all that food without first boxing it and loading it on one of the trailers. We took what we could carry, including an antique coffee grinder and a Country Living Grain Mill, the non-powered one. She also had a set of spare parts for the mill.

When I told Nels what we'd found, he went into his garage and brought out a bundle of U-Haul boxes and a tape gun. Food was more important, than finding people, he said. We could use the large portable diesel generator I took from the rental place to power the meat saw, grinder and slicer, probably all three at the same time. I could keep her guns, until later because I was, more or less, the designated armory. I wondered if commercially canned food wouldn't be just as good, but there were those jams, jellies and preserves. She had full bags of beans and rice but apparently hadn't touched them; sometimes older people have trouble digesting some things.

Just as Kim and I were leaving, Bob and Barry pulled in with a semi and flatbed carrying what looked like chest style freezers, big ones. I didn't know that there were than many new freezers in town! Well, one furniture store sold appliances and there were two appliance stores.

Had we found that semi carrying the load of meat during warm weather, we would have been SOL. It was also an upside for the grocery stores, without power, some things in the dairy case, like butter and some things in the meat case, like hams, were still good, although frozen. As it was, we could put off looking for livestock for the better part of a year although if we wanted eggs, we'd have to find live chickens soon.

Still on food, Mrs. Johnson baked and used commercial loaf pans. Her bread was as good as or better than any loaf you'd find in a grocery store. It had that fine texture and more flavor. I began to believe we might get through this. She had said they were Jewish, I wondered if she made the fabled, Jewish mother's chicken soup.

On the way back to the old lady's place, Kim said, "I've never been this late before."

"Think you're pregnant?"

"We'll get one of those testers from a drug store and find out."

"I'd feel mighty proud escorting a pregnant woman. Although, if you're pregnant, I'm not so sure I want you going."

"Try and stop me Barry Simpson," Kim said, crossing her arms and setting her jaw.

"I will when you look like Marilee Fitzsimmons."

"That's different."

We loaded the jars into the boxes and the boxes into the trailer. We returned home and the ladies said they would distribute it along with the other food. Nels said it would be a day or two before the meat cutting began and if we were going to find more people, we had an open window. We stopped by a drug store and got two of the test kits. We went to the next place on my list of places showing smoke. By now, it was a well established routine, me in front of the Hummer, Kim knocking on the door. This time, she got no response so I joined her and pounded harder.

"Open up, we're here to help, not to hurt. Please answer your door."

Still no response and the door was locked, I checked. I said, "Let's go," and we headed back to the Hummer. Just as we were crawling in, a young man, maybe 17 or 18 came out of the door.

"Wait."

"Kim, please go talk to him and get his story. He has a shotgun, be careful."

She visited with him for a bit and waved me forward.

"This is David Herman. He and his girlfriend, he didn't say her name, have been here alone since the war. They ditched class for a little adult behavior and ended up alone here for the duration."

"David, I'm Barry Simpson, can you give me more details?"

"We wanted to have sex, you know how it is. That didn't work out too well, I think she's pregnant. We've stayed in the basement the whole time. I've gone out for food twice; getting food we can eat right out of the can. My parents never came home. That's good because I'd didn't have to explain ditching school and Sherry being here, but otherwise not so hot."

"Is that the extent of your firearms?"

"Dad has a .357 magnum revolver and a Ruger 10/22. They are all his guns, I don't have any of my own."

"Want to move?"

"It's more like we need to move than anything. With Sherry in her condition, we're in trouble if we don't."

"Get what clothes you think you'll need and we'll go after Sherry's."

"She just lives down the block."

"Kim, please check on Sherry and see what she needs and how she is."

It wasn't long before David and Sherry came out with the guns, a suitcase and not much else. Kim was bringing up the rear. She leaned over and said softly, "She's fine and they didn't have much of anything."

We stopped at the house Sherry pointed out and Kim escorted her in to get some clothes. They would need to do some shopping, for maternity wear for the both of them. When Kim offered to let Sherry use the spare EPT, Sherry replied she already taken the test, twice, and there wasn't any doubt. EPTs are known for their accuracy according to Kim. Both were high school seniors, aged 18 and planned on getting married as soon as David got established.

In no particular order, we had the Simpson's, Tanner's, Daniels, Johnson's. Fitzsimmons and the Herman's. Six down and ten to go. Plus one Mr. Johnson. We got David and Sherry settled in a smaller three bedroom and Kim said she'd take Sherry shopping. Her test came out positive. I said I'd go along and cover their back. It would also be a good opportunity for me to get on another two story roof and look for smoke or steam. The women made it simple; they cleaned out the maternity department. I didn't observe any smoke I hadn't already seen, although it seemed as if there was more coming from the neighborhood I decided to avoid. I still had over a dozen single families for us to check out.

"How is Caleb?"

"Healing, I guess. Way beyond my training, I've said that before. No infection or at least no signs of an infection. That's surprising in and of itself. No shortness of breath or any of those kinds of signs, good appetite. Might have gotten just plain lucky."

"They teach you how to deliver babies?"

"In a pinch, why?"

"First, there's Mrs. Fitzsimmons, then there's the new girl Sherry, uh, Herman, let's say, I didn't get her last name and they'll probably do a common law marriage. Finally, Kim's test came back positive."

"Congratulations."

"Thanks."

"Isn't that something, six families and half of them pregnant? I guess everyone will have to start calling me Doc."

Although Nels wasn't a doctor, and far from it, he was the closest thing we had to a doctor. I decided I liked that better than Nels and from now on I'd call him Doc.

"Gotcha Doc."

"I didn't mean that, I was joking."

"No, but it fits."

He was also our plumber, electrician, mechanic and a good shot. While I could have figured most of those things out sooner or later, Nels already knew how to do them. If nothing else, he could teach the rest of us so he wouldn't be spread so thin. As a rent-a-cop, we had the rough equivalent to EMT basic, almost. It stopped short of delivering babies and was more like advanced first aid. We were expected to call for help, if such a situation arose. But then, why would it, I was guarding bonded shipments?

o

Over the course of the next two weeks, we found more folks with the other Barry and Kim doing the search. I helped Doc and we cut up the pork and wrapped it, then started in on the beef. His estimate about it taking two weeks was, for a change a bit short, we still had a half to cut and wrap. They had been several boxes of boneless beef on the trailer and we produced something akin to extra lean ground beef or ground chuck, 15% fat. He explained that by fat content, ground beef or hamburger was 30% fat, lean ground beef was 22% fat, extra lean ground beef was 15% fat, ground chuck was between 20% and 15% fat, ground round was between 15% and 10% fat and ground sirloin 8% to 10% fat. By definition, hamburger could have fat added, but ground beef couldn't.

We were down to two empty homes and still no Mr. Johnson. Some of the homes on that list had people who had been made a better offer, moving into that other neighborhood. Kim said they didn't press, if we had to buy them to get them to come, it wasn't worth it. Barry and she were making certain that everyone invited had something to offer Elm Gables.

Caleb was up and about now, but excused from guard duty. Hell, he was excused from everything except tending to his personal needs until he fully healed. He wasn't a bad kid; make that young man. He understood that him getting shot wasn't his fault and there were at least two people who felt more responsible, his father and me. The dirt bag who had shot him was probably dead, assuming he was part of the group we attacked.

Included in the new people were: John Hanson, engine mechanic, and his family; Chris Thomas, carpenter, and his family; Larry Smith, grocery store assistant manager, and his family; Russell Jamison, shop teacher, and his family; Rodney Jones, machinist, and his family; Ralph Meriwether, full time Sgt. First Class from the Guard post, and his

family; Donald Jones (no relation to Rodney), gunsmith, and his family; and last but not least, Gerald Hackworth, plumber, and his family.

On the last day we were going to cut meat, Doc took Larry Smith with him to do the wrapping, it was his grocery store we were using. That left Kim and I free to keep searching for people, although we'd run out of smoke and steam. I decided to check some of the downtown stores out and find that fire engine on the way home. We browsed, making notes of things that were available for later acquisition. In the fifth store, I thought I heard noise from the back room, drew my .45 and motioned Kim to cover me.

I eased my way into the back room and didn't see anything at first. Then, I caught movement out of the corner of my eye and turned, saying, "Hold it right there." Middle aged man who looked like he hadn't had a decent meal in a while. Positively grubby, hadn't had a bath for longer. Timid to say the least. He led his hands up and was literally shaking in his shoes.

"I'm Barry Simpson, what is your name?"

"Johnson."

"Johnson? What is your first name?"

"Fred."

"Are you single or married?"

"Married to a real witch, let me tell you."

"Are you armed?"

"All of my guns are at home in my gun safe."

"A Sentry safe? Combination lock?"

"As a matter of fact."

"M1A, HK416 and HK417, H&K USP Tactical and some cowboy guns?"

"Yes, how do you know?"

Kim – Chapter 13

"Your wife and kids survived and moved to our housing tract, Elm Gables. We'll take you to your new home to reunite with your family."

"Do I have to?"

Man, he threw me a curve. I wasn't prepared for that and was speechless for a moment. Kim responded instead.

"Yes, you have to Mr. Johnson. You've been shirking your responsibilities to your family. You have four fine children to provide for. I don't know what's between you and Karen, that's none of our business. Your kids deserve better."

"She had a wandering eye."

"To your knowledge, has she ever cheated on you?"

"Not to my knowledge, no."

"So you love her so much it makes you insanely jealous?"

"She is very attractive."

"Nobody said she wasn't. We don't have a shrink, so you're going to have to work out your own marriage problems. I assure you that none of the men in the tract consider her OVERLY attractive. They all married and have families of their own to take care of."

"In that case..."

"Come with us."

I figured when we showed up with Mr. Johnson there would be tears. Whether tears of joy or sorrow remained to be seen. After conversing with Doc, we decided to leave the two empty houses empty for the moment. They had the smallest generators, 15kw units. They were stocked with food and ready to be occupied. The ladies had washed the linen and the beds were ready to sleep on. They cleaned up and except for a coat of dust that was bound to accumulate, could take a new family at any time.

Bob had taken over security and Kim was excused from guard duty because she was pregnant. I still had a shift, a daylight shift. We now had security 24/7. The moat had lined with heavy plastic and filled with water. A generator had been moved from our small hospital and installed to keep the water tank filled. It was diesel and fed directly from a tanker. Our list was much shorter, a more permanent power solution all the way around and more salvaging of LTS food.

Some of the men went looking and found a large flock of chickens. One of them was a farm boy and clipped the chickens' wings so they couldn't fly. They had erected a chicken yard that took up a whole back yard and Chris and Russell built a hen house. We finally had a set of brood hens and other hens producing eggs.

Once Caleb had completely healed, I got him a better rifle and Nels and I taught him how to use it. It was one of the few M14s we'd found at the Guard post. It didn't really matter which gun Caleb had, once it was sighted in and he was shown the elevation adjustments, he could hit anything. The boy must have had 20/15 vision. He had long since forgotten about being hurt to the greater extent but we suspected that if someone shot at us, he'd put one right between their eyes. We didn't give him a handgun because he didn't understand them and didn't need one.

I don't know what happened at the Johnson household, but when all was said and done, Fred was a new, more confident man. He gave Steve his HK417 to use and Karen his HK416 to use. I supplied the two of them with M9s.

o

With most of our long term goals fulfilled, we could have a small team searching for food while the remainder of us concentrated on the longer term goals. We had brought back the fire engine, moved the city equipment back to the city yard and moved the empty flatbeds and trailers to a parking lot not far off. One person was assigned to keep the propane tanks topped off and to locate an additional supply for when we exhausted what there was in our town.

The long term goals related to long term power, restoring some sort of communications within our tract and starting the process of growing our own food. Ralph met one goal using equipment from the guard post, something called an AN/TTC-39 Tri-Tac. It was a trailer filled with communications gear. We had telephone communications, something I'd thought we'd never have. He hooked into the telephone company's blocks of wires out near the front fence. He explained that telephone companies typically installed cable with a large number of pairs, as many as 100. These were terminated on blocks between the Telco and the tract, allowing the Telco to reroute communications if a pair went bad.

We now entered a new phase in our efforts to survive the aftermath of WW III, long term rather than short term survival. We held a meeting with all of the adults and some of the older young people attending. The subject was electrical power.

"The only name I know associated with wind turbines is Bergey. I don't know how large they make them, but they're home units."

"Michelle and I checked out the Bergey units, they run up to about 10kw for their Excel model. I don't think that would do it for the water well. Did anyone see the size of those cables? We probably couldn't have run it without the hospital generator."

"We need something big. Anyone know where they could find a big one?"

"All over California, if California is still there. We could go that far, but there must be dozens of cities destroyed between here and there," I replied

"Well, I heard about two wind farms, one in northern Iowa and the other in western Kansas."

"Closer but I'd hate to go that far and have to dismantle a turbine, move it here and re-assemble it."

"But, 10 of those Bergey units would equal 100kw. That should be enough for the water pump."

"The place where Michelle and I looked at the Bergey's had to order them, they didn't stock them."

"What about that wind farm in Iowa?"

"It was completed back in 2010 or 11. Same town has an ethanol plant, Charlestown I think."

"Charles City. That's a Vera Sun ethanol plant. It's west of town and the wind farm was south of town, if I recall."

"How would you know?"

"Got a big write up in the Des Moines Register."

"How long would it take to get there?"

"Maybe two days."

"Way too far," I suggested.

"If we can get the parts, I can rebuild the diesel engines."

"I guess we'd better look into that. It's probably easier for now to rebuild the engines. We'll have to revisit this question at a later date."

"Did we have any other long term issues?"

"No, just power."

"Good, I'm going to bed," Nels said.

o

"I'm at a loss. I'll tell you, Kim, I don't have any idea how to get long term electricity."

"I know you are, I think that Nels will come up with something. We still have two empty homes, maybe we can find an electrician and his family. He might know where to get what we need."

"Any way you slice it, it comes down to either solar or wind."

"Yes, it's a shame we don't have a river running through town, we could go to hydroelectric."

"I hadn't considered hydroelectric, but you're right, we don't have a river."

"How long will that big diesel engine last?"

"Thirty thousand hours? Four years, give or take."

"Why don't we start it and fill the tank, then shut it down until the tank needs refilling?"

"That gives me an idea. Remember how Nels wired our generators? One kicks in when the other shuts down because of low oil or something. If we worked it right, we could have the generator kick in when the tank is down to say maybe 25% and shut down once it's full."

"Ask him tomorrow what it would take."

"I doubt they run the well pump 24/7, there are probably already switches installed that we could hook into."

The following day, we inspected the tank and it had all kinds of instrumentation and valves. Because the big diesel was an electrical start model, it didn't take Doc long to figure out the wiring and rig it like he had rigged their and our dual generator set up. While I didn't consider myself as the leader of Elm Gables, many of the newer people apparently did. Nels and Carol had lived there since construction and if anyone ought to be the community leaders, it should be them; I didn't relish the role or the responsibility.

"How come everyone thinks of me as the leader, Doc?"

"You assumed the role Barry. It happened when you selected the people to move in here."

"I don't want it."

"You have it, get used to it."

"But, you've lived here longer and have so much more experience."

"And, with the experience came the knowledge to keep my mouth shut and stay out of the limelight."

"But you're the number two man or co-administrator, I hope."

"I am and will continue to be so long as you handle the hassles and leave me out of the day to day decisions. If something big comes up, we'll decide it together or call a meeting for all to decide."

"Thanks to you, we have fairly good security, it's layers deep and will allow us to avoid a frontal assault were one to come."

"The other three sides leave something to be desired."

"It's never perfect, even a fort with walls six foot thick could be breeched."

"I know. I've been working on a scheme to solve that to some extent."

"Like what?"

"One thought I had was motion sensors tied together in a single location. The problem with that would be any stray animal could set them off. Then, I thought about concertina, but that would take a lot of wire."

"What if we installed motion sensors back from the walls a little ways? That might catch anyone climbing the fences."

"It would also take a lot of sensors. We don't have a Radio Shack so that would mean going back to the other town."

"True, but we let the ball drop on that community. We never did go and check out the gun stores and grocery stores, what with Caleb getting hurt. We talked about it, but we got busy and it never happened."

"No time like the present."

"We'll take one Hummer and one pickup. That should be more than enough room to haul anything we find."

"We'd better tow the trailers; you never know what we might find."

"Any kind of priority?"

"Security, firearms then groceries."

"Works for me. We'll probably need the tractor and a box trailer if we found a lot of food."

"You never know, with the just in time inventory system, there's as likely as not a delivery truck pulled up at one of the stores."

"Or, all three stores."

"That would be damned lucky."

"They're all different chains and I'd expect they get deliveries nearly every day, so why not?"

"If that's the case, we're going to need drivers. They can double as security."

"We'll take John, Larry and Bob."

"We'd better take Ralph too. We can fit four in the Hummer and two in the pickup without crowding."

"All right. Say 30 minutes?"

"Where are you going?"

"Next town over, looking for motion detectors, firearms and ammo and groceries."

"I want to go too."

"Is that a good idea, Kim?"

"It's better than you leaving me here, that's for sure."

"Am I going to lose this argument?"

"Most likely."

"Get your gear. You can ride in the Hummer and be the gunner."

I know I should have let Ralph be the gunner, but Kim had mastered the Ma Deuce about as well as anyone could. She'd done very well in the firefight we'd had when we attacked the jail inmates. Plus, she could stay in the Hummer and watch our backside while we were searching. It had the added bonus of having her wrapped in armor. This is the good old US of A and I don't think anyone has an RPG-7 outside of a museum. I

was confident that would leave her at the top of the heap in terms of firepower. I/we'd cleaned out all of the Mk211MP and rockets from the Guard post.

o

"That's the extent of the motion sensors and consoles. I think we have enough. We'll decide later where we want to put the central console, Barry. Probably either your place or mine."

"I checked the yellow pages and have a list of sporting goods stores and gun stores. There is only one gun store as far as I can tell. Some of the sporting goods stores were listed under both listings."

"We'd better check them all, just to be sure."

"That sounds like a plan."

The motion detectors and consoles only took up a small place in the back of the pickup and would have fit in the back of the Hummer. We went from store to store, taking all firearms and ammunition. Most were sporting arms, hunting rifles, shotguns and handguns. The gun store was a different story. We search the place very carefully and came away with at least four dozen military weapons and two pallets of ammo. After my experience with the gun store where Michelle had been killed, I/we didn't miss one single nook or cranny.

That left three grocery stores to check out and only one had a delivery trailer. All three had been ransacked to a degree, but whoever did it hadn't concentrated on LTS foods. Since the trailer was partly empty, we reloaded the pallets back on and moved through the same store trying to take every last ounce of LTS foods and some of the short term foods we were running low on. We concluded that we'd have to come back with that trailer and load it up from the other two grocery stores. This long after the war, anyone who might have survived had probably bugged out.

No one saw the pair of eyes watching us while we checked out the third grocery store. We hadn't taken anything and that was duly noted. Those eyes were in a head that lay along the stock of an Accuracy International AW50A1, a very accurate \$13,000 rifle which sported very expensive optics. Weighted a bit less than a Barrett, but may have been more accurate. The AW stood for Arctic Warfare, good to -40°.

"We didn't do half bad. I think we got the guns and ammo, that's a comfort. We can go back tomorrow and refill the trailer with food from the other two stores."

"We'll do that. Then, we can get back to solving our long term problem with keeping the water pumping. What I rigged for now will work fine, but sooner or later, the generator will need to be rebuilt."

"All of them will need to be rebuilt, eventually."

"And, there's the rub. How many rebuild kits do you think that store has?"

"Can't we substitute some parts?"

"That will depend. Our generators are the Cummins DG series and have the same engine. It's a Cummins engine, so I don't know if that will be a problem or not. Those gas generators use all kinds of different engines, which could be more problematic."

"Yes, and we don't have a lifetime supply of oil or filters."

"You're right, Nels. I'm not sure what to do about that, though."

"We'll have to find the suppliers, even if it means going back to the oil change places and going through their records. The store probably got its filters directly from Cummins, but they didn't seem to be unique or we wouldn't have found useable filters in the car parts stores. They must have suppliers too; we'll have to find one. I think Fram is the major oil filter producer in the country."

"Pay me now, or pay me later? We'll try to find a distributor."

It wasn't to be, Fram didn't make the filter we needed, but others did. It was a long sucker. We also determined that we were changing the filters too often. That greatly extended our supply. The filters only needed to be changed once every six months according to John, however that only applied to the genuine Cummins filters. We had plenty of those, so the next time we changed the oil and filter, we use the genuine parts. John said that came directly from a Cummins whitepaper that detailed daily, weekly, monthly, semi-annual and annual maintenance items. If he's wrong, he'll be the one rebuilding the engine.

It is generally a good idea to establish and adhere to a schedule of maintenance and service based on the specific power application and the severity of the environment. For example, if the generator set will be used frequently or subjected to extreme operating conditions, the recommended service intervals should be reduced accordingly. Some of the factors that can affect the maintenance schedule include:

- Using the diesel generator set for continuous duty (prime power)
- Extreme ambient temperatures
- Exposure to weather
- Exposure to salt water
- Exposure to dust, sand or other airborne contaminants

Well, on second thought...

◦

We backed up to the loading dock of the first of the two stores we intended to salvage. Because much of what we wanted was out of the shipping boxes, it took a while to pack it into boxes and load it. I'm just guessing, but probably about as long as it took them to stock the shelves in the first place. We had a make do lunch using things from the store. Nearly everything was still frozen solid. Then we moved to the second store, our third store the previous day. We had no more than arrived than I got that unsettled feeling. We stood behind the two Hummers and discussed it. Nels agreed, something was wrong. The only other person, besides Kim, who felt something was wrong was Ralph, our soldier. We didn't put it up to a vote, we began to fan out, looking.

BAMM, the rifle went, sounding like a .308. Kim couldn't see anything and dropped out of the gunner's cupola, grabbed her rifle and got behind the Hummer. In so doing, she more or less pointed us in the direction the shot had come from. It had hit the cupola, passing through and just missing her.

"They're on the side away from me, up high," she said.

That helped, but not a lot because the entire block on the other side of the street was two story buildings. Because the bullet had penetrated in and back out, according to Kim, we took it to mean armor piercing ammo, not Raufoss. No amount of bullet proof vest would help against a .50BMG, armor piercing or not. Since we had the same crew as the previous day, each of us took a building, doing the dividing up using hand signals.

I got to the roof of my building and it was empty. About then, I heard Larry yell, "Freeze. Move away from the weapon. Hands up." Larry was armed with an A3 and a M9. When the person stood, you couldn't really tell anything about him other than he was wearing a parka against the cold. Larry remained where he was, motioning with the rifle every time the guy's hands began to drop. We climbed down and reassembled on the roof of the building where Larry was.

"That's a might fancy rifle, Barry. Accuracy International, they cost a large fortune."

"Let's get this hood off so we can see his face."

"A woman???"

"Why can't a woman shoot?"

"I didn't say that, my wife shoots pretty damned good. Usually the bad guys are guys, not women."

"I'm not a bad guy, you were about to steal my food."

"Do you have other firearms?"

"Why, want to pat me down?"

"I'll take your word, well, do you?"

"I have a Glock in a waistband holster."

"Kim, we need your help, the shooter is a woman. Please keep your hands in the clear, for now."

Kim joined us and disarmed the woman. I put her age in the later 20s.

"Gloria, why did you shoot at me?"

"I didn't know it was you Kim, you're so anti-gun."

"Not anymore, I'm not."

"What happened to you?"

"Barry happened to me, we're married and I'm expecting."

Oh great, now we have to sit around and listen while the two women get caught up. Then Kim said, "We have two empty homes in our tract, with power, food and the whole nine yards."

"Take the food, I'll come with you."

Which, of course, put us back to having one extra unattached female, the Mrs. Johnson situation, with a feisty, younger woman. We men went and began loading the truck while Kim and Gloria talked.

"That's about it."

"I'll have to find Kim."

"Kim and Gloria, is it, are in a Hummer and look like they're ready to leave."

"Ok, we'll redistribute the men to the available vehicles. What do you know about that rifle? I've heard about them but never actually saw one."

"I wonder why she missed?"

Kim – Chapter 14

"Probably overcompensated for the elevation, which would cause her to shoot low. Normally, when you're shooting up hill or downhill, the bullet drop is reduced due to the reduced amount of gravity. If you don't compensate, you tend to shoot high and if you overcompensate, you tend to shoot low."

"Those rifles have a MSRP of around 13 grand, without the scope. The German Army used the Zeiss optics while the manufacturer prefers the German made Schmidt & Bender PM II product line. She has the complete setup with the suppressor; made the rifle sound like a .308."

"But she seems to be an accomplished shooter."

"Maybe not with that rifle."

o

"So, tell me about Gloria."

"She worked in the law office. Before that, she was in the Army. We used to argue over guns."

"Did she every say what unit she was in?"

"Seventh Calvary."

"Armor?"

"That what she said."

"That was Custer's unit. They still use the same theme, Garryowen."

"We have to find a roommate for Gloria."

"Yeah, she's an overpowering version of Mrs. Johnson."

"Just you remember what I told you about wandering eyes."

"I think that's a song."

"Don't, you don't have a singing voice."

"I don't remember the lyrics anyway."

We'd be on the lookout for a single man, about my age, who might be interested in get-

ting together with a single woman of the same age. I figured we want a shooter, some guy who might be interested enough in that fancy rifle to actually check out the woman who now owned it. I found it interesting that the only name duplication here in the tract was my name, Barry, a somewhat uncommon name.

Kim wasn't showing, yet; she wore a maternity top anyway, proud of the fact that we were expecting. So was I, it was my first child too, although I'd have preferred she wait for the maternity clothes until she needed them. This was the aftermath of the Third World War. It didn't seem, on the surface, to be anything other than another, normal day.

On a normal day, we didn't go around armed to the teeth, the first change. Our electricity now made a fair amount of noise, a second change. We couldn't pop down to our friendly market to get something for supper, and on and on. In many ways, our lives had become constrained, much like they'd been before modern technology. Yet, it was modern, or semi-modern, technology that kept the lights on. Plus, our killing machines, the rifles, pistols, machineguns, rockets and bombs were high technology, for the most part.

No amount of lamenting what happened would ever change it. We have to improvise, adapt and overcome. One large wind turbine, or several smaller ones, could keep us in electricity for 20 years or more. Solar panels could do the same, if we could find them and all of the accessories. Technology got us where we were and technology was going to get us out. I almost hated the word and at times felt like saddling a horse, sticking the Winchester model 92 in a scabbard, strapping on the .44-40 and heading out. I couldn't do that because I was married, we were expecting and I didn't have a horse, saddle or rifle scabbard.

o

"Caleb is going back on guard duty."

"Do you think that wise?"

"He keeps insisting that we let him do his little part because there are so many things he can't do. As far as his injury, it's healed enough that he can sit in a Hummer at night and keep an eye out. Good vision, good shot and I don't think he'll ever let someone catch him flat footed again."

"Caleb's special."

"Yes he is. People look down on him because he's not the brightest bulb in the box. There are lots of people who only have an IQ slightly higher than his who are called normal. He's the only son we have, or will have, some kind of genetics mix-up. He can tend to his own needs, cook a meal if he has a can opener, and man, can he shoot a rifle."

"Down's?"

"No, something called PKU that we caught fairly early. Not early enough, apparently, but early. Could be other complications later, but none have shown up."

"I always felt secure with Caleb on guard. What did Bob say?"

"He said he'd adjust the schedule and include Caleb."

Bob had changed. Once he seemed to be a total liberal. When he'd realized the reality of our situation, he'd changed, practically overnight. He'd once said, "Doesn't the boy have enough problems?" Apparently, he held Caleb in higher respect than some.

o

Over the next few years, Kim presented me with two sons and a daughter. We found a moderately large wind turbine and set it up for the water supply. Every home was equipped with smaller 35kw turbines, batteries and solar. We found an Army sniper from another unit and married him and Gloria. We never filled the 16th house.

About twenty years after the event, who should show up but the National Guard and FEMA. We'd removed the Claymore mines and stored them, just in case. Our town was an out of the way place, but not that out of the way. We were far better off than many, they said. They had a medical doctor and dentist and we were all examined and pronounced fit. The dentist stayed for a few days, saving what teeth he could. He'd come by yearly, with the physician. They marveled at our ingenuity, filled us in on who was running the county and the regular things one might expect.

Forty years later, we were still all going strong, although age was catching up with most of us. No one developed cancer, unusual for normal times, especially unusual for a post global thermonuclear war world. Nels had pulled us through one medical emergency after another, had delivered umpteen babies, and still found time to tinker.

o

Phenylketonuria (PKU): Since its discovery there have been many advances in its treatment. It can now be successfully managed by the patient under ongoing medical supervision to avoid the more serious side-effects. If, however, the condition is left untreated, it can cause problems with brain development, leading to progressive mental retardation, brain damage and seizures. In the past, PKU was treated with a low-phenylalanine diet. Latter-day research now has shown that diet alone may not be enough to prevent the negative effects of phenylalanine levels. Optimal treatment involves lowering blood Phe levels to a safe range and monitoring diet and cognitive development. Lowering of phenylalanine levels to a safe range may be achieved by combining a low-phenylalanine diet with protein supplements. There is currently no cure for

this disease; however, some treatments are available with varying success rates. In general, PKU is detected through newborn screening and diagnosed by a geneticist. PKU clinics around the world provide care for PKU patients to optimize phe levels, dietary intake, and cognitive outcomes.

Phe: Phenylalanine

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